

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



April 2014

Vol. 119, No. 4

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON

Freedom in Life

INDIVIDUALS who are to get freedom in this life have to live thousands of years in one lifetime. They have to be ahead of their times, but the masses can only crawl. Thus we have Christs and Buddhas.

There was once a Hindu queen, who so much desired that all her children should attain freedom in this life that she herself took all the care of them; and as she rocked them to sleep, she sang always the one song to them – “Tat tvam asi, Tat tvam asi” (“That thou art, That thou art”).

Three of them became Sannyasins, but the fourth was taken away to be brought up elsewhere to become a king. As he was leaving home, the mother gave him a piece of paper which he was to read when he grew to manhood. On that piece of paper was written, “God alone is true. All else is false. The soul never kills or is killed. Live alone or in the company of holy ones.” When the young prince read this, he too at once renounced the world and became a Sannyasin.

Give up, renounce the world. Now we are like dogs strayed into a kitchen and eating a piece of meat, looking round in fear lest at any moment someone may come and drive them out. Instead of that, be a king and know you own the world. This never comes until you give it up and it ceases to bind. Give up mentally, if you do not physically.



Give up from the heart of your hearts. Have Vairagya (renunciation). This is the real sacrifice, and without it, it is impossible to attain spirituality. Do not desire, for what you desire you get, and with it comes terrible bondage. We never get freedom until we are self-contained.

Learn to feel yourself in other bodies, to know that we are all one. Throw all other nonsense to the winds. Spit out your actions, good or bad, and never think of them again. What is done is done. Throw off superstition. Have no weakness even in the face of death. Do not repent, do not brood over past deeds, and do not remember your good deeds; be free. The weak, the fearful, the ignorant will never reach Atman. . God helps those who do *not* help themselves.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2013), 7.93–95.

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TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

The Path and the Goal

April 2014
Vol. 119, No. 4

एतज्ज्ञेयं नित्यमेवात्मसंस्थं नातः परं वेदितव्यं हि किञ्चित् ।
भोक्ता भोग्यं प्रेरितारं च मत्वा सर्वं प्रोक्तं त्रिविधं ब्रह्ममेतत् ॥

After knowing all these, of three kinds—the enjoyer (individual soul), the things of enjoyment, and the internal Ruler—that have been spoken of as Brahman, this (Brahman) is to be invariably known as existing in one's own heart, since there is nothing to be known beyond this.

(Shvetashvatara Upanishad, 1.12)

अनन्तमव्ययं कविं समुद्रेऽन्तं विश्वशम्भुवम् ।
पद्मकोशप्रतीकाशं हृदयं चाप्यधोमुखम् ॥

One should meditate upon the Supreme—the limitless, unchanging, all-knowing, cause of the happiness of the world, dwelling in the sea of one's own heart—as the goal of all striving. The place for Its meditation is the space of the heart, which is comparable to an inverted lotus bud.

(Mahanarayana Upanishad, 13.6)

संप्राप्यैनमृषयो ज्ञानतृप्ताः कृतात्मानो वीतरागाः प्रशान्ताः ।
ते सर्वगं सर्वतः प्राप्य धीरा युक्तात्मानः सर्वमेवाविशन्ति ॥

Having attained this (Brahman), the seers become content with their knowledge, established in the Self, freed from attachment, and composed. Having realized the all-pervasive One everywhere, these discerning people, ever merged in contemplation, enter into the All.

(Mundaka Upanishad, 3.2.5)

THIS MONTH

The world and everything in it can be encapsulated in two words: **Experience and Expression.**



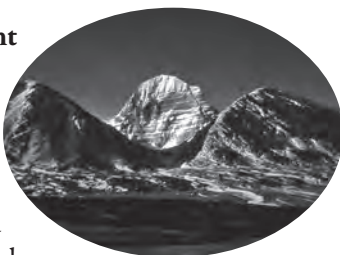
Asim Chaudhuri, a well-known author and researcher on Swami Vivekananda literature from Phoenix, Arizona, attempts **A Comparative Study of**

Swami Vivekananda and St Paul. He is indebted to Kathleen Albert from the Vedanta Center of Greater Washington, DC, for some helpful suggestions.

Dr V Vasanthakumari, Associate Professor, Department of Veda at the Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady, points out to **Acharya Shankara: Delineator of India** and describes how the Acharya's astounding travels contributed to shaping the spiritual and cultural map of India.

Pilgrimage to Mount

Kailash is a recapitulation of Swami Damodarananda's experiences of great suffering and rewards while wander-



ing in the Himalayas, sixty years ago. He is a senior and venerable swami of the Order living a retired life at the Ramakrishna Math, Ulsoor, Bengaluru.



This age is the beginning of a new phase of Swami Vivekananda's message making its presence felt in the world. Swami Satyamayyananda, Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* reflects on

its significance in **Concluding Programme of Swami Vivekananda's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebrations: A Retrospect.**

Swami Vivekananda linked both the Shruti and Smriti texts and presented to the world a new paradigm of spirituality. This is the second part of Dr M Sivaramkrishna's **The Many-splendoured Vivekananda's Vedanta.** He is former Head of the Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad.



In the concluding part of **Life and Death** Prof. Kaulir Kisor Chatterjee writes how death really means a transformation of forms and energy. The professor from Nagpur is former Chief Mineral Economist, Indian Bureau of Mines.

The need for holy company and its positive effects are delineated in the seventeenth part of Swami Adbhutananda's **Eternal Words.** The swami's words are translated from Sat Katha, published from Udbodhan Office, Kolkata.

Experience and Expression

THE MIND HAS various levels differently called as conscious, pre-conscious, subconscious, and unconscious. The sages and yogis of India have experienced and added the higher super-conscious stages called samadhis. To really understand ourselves, we have to traverse back to our source. And when we do that, we shall find everything living and non-living has a common origin, the transcendental. All small ideas of 'self' and its apparent death are then eradicated by this spiritual perception. Every religion and philosophy has tried to solve the problem of *jiva*, *jagat*, world, and *Ishvara*. These three entities appear distinct, but the rishis declare that in the highest experience all three are merged into one. Swami Vivekananda says: 'Is not the whole universe you? Where is there any one that is not you? You are the Soul of this universe. You are the sun, moon, and stars, it is you that are shining everywhere. The whole universe is you. Whom are you going to hate or to fight? Know, then, that thou art He, and model your whole life accordingly; and he who knows this and models his life accordingly will no more grovel in darkness.'

Ordinarily, each *sankalpa*, thought, in the mind is a mixture of the conscious and the subconscious, or the external and the internal. This *sankalpa* is really a movement of the mind and expresses itself through language, signs, symbols, and body language. As the *sankalpa* becomes grosser we express it through literature, art, and architecture. The sages in India saw *vai-khara*, audible sound or speech, as the last of the series of vibrations emanating from deep layers

of *madhyama*, middle, the subtle stage corresponding to the heart centre, where thoughts can be experienced. Still deeper is *pashyanti*, visualized, the causal stage corresponding to the navel centre, where words and thoughts are indistinguishable, and *para*, transcendental, which is the source of sound and is situated in the *muladhara*.

In the study of the inner world the ancient sages accepted the eternality and inseparability of *shabda*, sound, and *artha*, meaning, or object. Later the various tantric texts spoke of this combination as Shiva and Shakti respectively. This combination arises from *shabda brahma*, sound Brahman, which is the syllable Om and expresses itself in increasingly grosser vibratory forms to become this world and the objects. Thus the creative force of the universe resides in sound. The use of sound is employed by all religions as prayers, incantations, worship, and so on. In India it extended to all the arts as well, for the sages knew that true creativity in any form is spirituality expressing itself. Sacred places of pilgrimages are also an expression of God—it is God in one form.

Each stage of sound corresponds to a level of consciousness. The purer the consciousness, the higher is the experience of existence. This is the reason why purity in thought, word, and deed is stressed in all religions. The four stages of sound also are harnessed to the four states of *jagrat*, waking, *svapna*, dream, *sushupti*, deep sleep, and *turiya*, transcendental. In the transcendental stage there is unity of sound and meaning. The three lower levels of sound are connected to the

three worlds of *bhuh*, earth, *bhuvah*, intermediate regions, and *suvah*, heaven.

In this way the sages showed how the individual is linked to the cosmos. Just as we express our thoughts, words, and deeds, so does the Creator express himself as the universe. Swamiji says: 'If I tried to express all these by only telling you that God created the universe, it would have conveyed no meaning to you. Yet, after all this struggle, we have come back to Him, the Ancient and Supreme One.'

Every religion also has three stages, according to Swamiji: philosophy, mythology, and rituals. We can add another stage called institutional. In most religions the first three are mostly mixed up. But these stages are the result of experience and expression. All religions begin with the original experience of the rishis, prophets, acharyas, and founders of religion. It is a direct experience: 'I know the infinite Purusha that is like the sun and which is beyond darkness.' The experience can also take the form of: 'I have seen God', 'God spoke to me'. In Buddhism, which does not believe in a personal God, we have Buddha having a transcendental experience too. So this transcendental experience can be of the personal God, or Saguna Brahman, or Nirguna Brahman. When this experience is remembered and written down, it becomes holy writ and unalterable. This then is the source of all world scriptures: direct experience of the Reality.

In order to make the experience concrete and intelligible to others, the founders express themselves in ordinary language or parables. This expression then becomes philosophy, theology, or doctrine, as it is seen through the intellect. The experience is further expressed in the language of the masses through stories, historical or otherwise, so that the experience can access larger audiences. Finally, that experience becomes even more concrete in the forms of rituals. The fourth

stage of institutionalization comes when a class of people, priests generally, appropriate that experience and organize people around it through philosophy, mythology, rituals, and also through moral codes. In this way the original truth is spread among the general population. All these rules and regulations and moral codes mould the religious institutions, and in time, due to many factors like politics or economics, become powerful. Morality curbs violence, selfishness, and greed; that is why religion becomes a crucial factor in building civilizations. The priests then design sacred places, times, and persons, and the original experience, which is now almost unrecognizable, settles in society. Art, architecture, and literature proliferate through religious themes and this becomes a great cultural force.

The important thing to understand is that these stages of religious expressions are trying to recapitulate the original experience—this is the core of all religious doctrines. And that original experience takes various forms such as going to heaven, meeting the Creator, liberation, and so forth. The Hindus also say that everyone, without exception, is moving towards liberation and will in time be liberated. But it takes many rebirths, until finally we understand that we have come from God and have to go back to God. Swamiji says that religion is 'the eternal relation between the eternal soul and the eternal God.'

Religion is entwined in individual life, just as the whole creation is. As we cannot dissociate ourselves from creation, we cannot, for the same reason, dissociate ourselves from religion or spirituality, for it is part of our transcendental divine nature. Religions stumble when they do not think there can be many experiences and expressions of the one Reality. It is now becoming increasingly clear that in every moment and movement of our ordinary life, we are experiencing and expressing, on our own level, the Reality.





A Comparative Study of Swami Vivekananda and St Paul

Asim Chaudhuri

THERE IS AN UNCANNY similarity between Sri Ramakrishna's Narendranath, commonly known as Swami Vivekananda, and Christ's Paul, commonly known as St Paul. They were born about two millennia apart: Paul in c.8 CE and Vivekananda in 1863. Both were born into pious families and in places of learning and culture: Paul in Tarsus, a provincial capital of Rome under Greek influence, and Vivekananda in Calcutta, a provincial capital of India under British influence. Both were their respective Masters' favourites, entrusted with spreading their Masters' messages far and near. The similarities, some of which are based on incidents and some on their apparent attributes or motivations, are discussed in this article. A few subtle differences are also addressed.

The Two Apostles

A resurrected Jesus Christ revealed himself to Paul on the road to Damascus, transforming his life and choosing him to proclaim the Master's gospel to the world. This occurred around c.36 CE, a few years after Christ's crucifixion. Paul



later said: 'For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle, ... a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.'¹ Vivekananda's encounter with Sri Ramakrishna in the early 1880s was similar, and Sri Ramakrishna prophesized: 'Narendra will teach others.'² In the case of Paul it was a conversion from a persecutor of Christianity to the Lord's true apostle—although Paul always characterized it as a 'call', not a conversion. In the case of Vivekananda it was the end of his search for meeting someone who had realized God. One was an instantaneous transformation, the other a gradual transition—Vivekananda also believed it was a 'call' for him.

There is only one instance in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature where this similarity has been addressed. Bipinchandra Pal, a militant Indian nationalist and patriot, drew a parallel between Paul and Vivekananda: 'The seer is always a mystic. So was Paramahansa Ramakrishna: so was Jesus; so were all the great spiritual leaders of men. ... Paramahansa Ramakrishna, like Jesus Christ, needed an interpreter to explain him and deliver his message to his age. Jesus found such an interpreter in St Paul; Ramakrishna found him in Vivekananda.'³ There is another place, however, where the similarity has been referred to in a non-specific way as a footnote, when Vivekananda refers to Paul thus: 'The mild type creates, the thundering type spreads. Paul was the thundering type to spread the light.'⁴ The footnote says: 'And it has been said by many that Swami Vivekananda himself was a kind of St Paul to Sri Ramakrishna' (*ibid.*).

Vivekananda once compared himself with Paul, rather unobtrusively, but not in public. In the summer of 1896, while in England at 63 St George's Road along with E T Sturdy, Henrietta Müller, his younger brother Mahendranath Datta, and others, Vivekananda made a clear

distinction between 'fanatics' and 'learned fanatics'. According to Mahendranath, Swamiji was sitting in a chair with eyes closed, in seemingly deep contemplation, when he suddenly opened his eyes, straightened up, and told others in the room that he had been thinking about Paul and Christianity. He then told them—actually he was addressing John Fox according to Mahendranath—that the only reason Paul, who was a member of a subject race and represented a minor religion, could overturn the philosophy and culture of the powerful Greeks and Romans was because he was a 'learned fanatic'. He added excitedly: 'Do you know what I am? Paul was a learned fanatic; I am a learned fanatic, and I like to create a band of learned fanatics. Plain fanaticism will not work; it is a brain disease, and it results in much mischief.'⁵ Mahendranath did not say how Vivekananda defined 'learned fanatic', but looking at Vivekananda's and Paul's personalities one may assume that it was to possess a blend of mysticism, intense faith, and rational thinking.

When Vivekananda visited Rome with Captain and Mrs J H Sevier in December 1896, he seemed incredibly familiar with the history of early Rome:

Swamiji was very quiet at first, but the more one watched him, the more convinced one became of the interest that lay behind the outward calm. He was thinking of the Rome of long ago—the Rome of wide-flung imperial might, which it expressed in architectural forms, marvellous for their size and beauty. ... Thus he resurrected the inhabitants, the culture, and the events of the great past, and those who were with him remarked, 'This is wonderful, Swami! You seem to know every stone in Rome!' And through his luminous consciousness and historical knowledge, they saw the whole meaning of Roman influence on our modern world.⁶

In Rome, the bastion of the Catholic Church, Vivekananda visited all major basilicas and other tourist attractions of historical significance. He also visited a nondescript and secluded monastery, away from the splendour of Rome's more famous churches and monuments, called the Abbazia della Tre Fontane—Tre Fontane Abbey. The church supposedly had been built at the location where the Apostle Paul, who preached the gospel to the first-century world, was beheaded by the order of Emperor Nero. As the story goes, the severed head struck the earth rebounding in three places, and in each of these places a fountain sprang forth—hence the name Tre Fontane, three fountains.⁷ The abbey belonged to the French Trappist monks, who spent half the day in prayers and the remainder in work and meditation. Was it symbolic that Vivekananda had visited this particular location where Paul had breathed his last? Was it where the two great apostles from two different worlds were destined to meet one another on 26 December 1896?

Similarities in Their Teachings

Both Paul and Vivekananda espoused God's omnipresence. Vivekananda wrote:

He who is in you and outside you,
Who works through all hands,
Who walks on all feet,
Whose body are all ye,
Him worship, and break all other idols!⁸

Paul said: 'God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands. For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said. For we are also his offspring.'⁹ The sentiments are similar.

On several occasions Vivekananda invoked Paul, and always in a complimentary way. He

quoted Paul to drive home his message of oneness of God and divinity of humankind. In this regard their thought processes were quite similar:

The idea is expressed by St Paul, 'The God that ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you.' This is the lesson for the whole world to learn. What have these philosophies and theories of nature to do, if not to help us to attain to this one goal in life? Let us come to that consciousness of the identity of everything and let man see himself in everything. Let us be no more the worshippers of creeds or sects with small limited notions of God, but see Him in everything in the universe. If you are knowers of God, you will everywhere find the same worship as in your own heart.¹⁰

On the subject of 'love' and 'love of God', both apostles had very similar views. Paul talks incessantly about love:

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the Truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.¹¹

Vivekananda's lectures and writings are replete with concepts of love. He carried the concept further by characterizing love's three attributes: (i) Love never asks for anything, but

gives; (ii) love knows no fear; and (iii) love is not the means but the end. To explain why love is so important, as Paul had also done, Vivekananda added: 'Unless there is love, philosophy becomes dry bones, psychology becomes a sort of [theory], and work becomes mere labor. [If there is love], philosophy becomes poetry, psychology becomes [mysticism], and work the most delicious thing in creation. [By merely] reading books [one] becomes barren. Who becomes learned? He who can feel even one drop of love. God is love, and love is God. And God is everywhere.'¹²

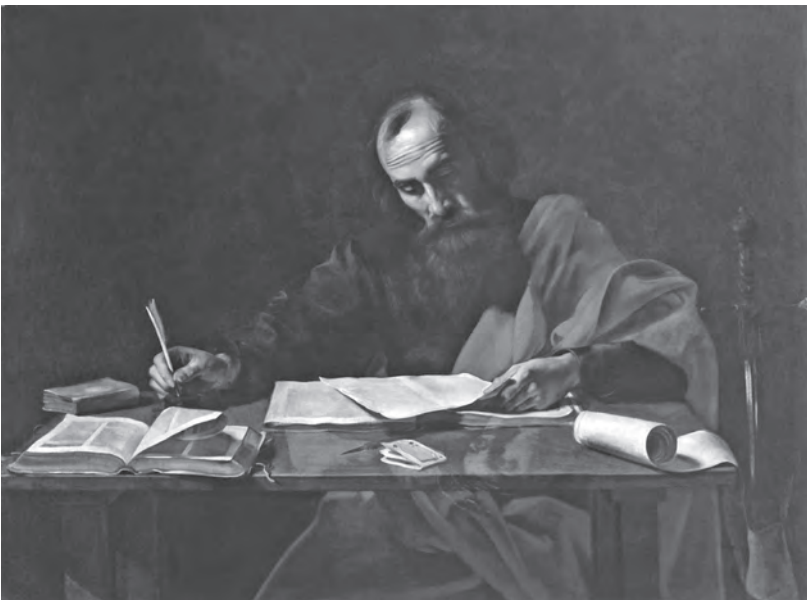
Their Travels and Works

Vivekananda was called the 'Cyclonic Hindoo' due to his whirlwind travelling pattern while spreading the gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Paul did the same for Jesus, and could be called the 'Cyclonic Christian'. In the 'Acts of the Apostles' Luke recounted all of Paul's missionary journeys. Leaving aside his first journey, which was actually entrusted mainly to Barnabas, and his fourth one, in which he was brought to Rome as prisoner, in his other two major journeys Paul covered the Middle East, parts of Europe,

and other Mediterranean regions. In his two trips to the West, mainly to the US and England, Vivekananda established, as Paul did, 'faith communities'—formal Vedanta Societies and informal Vedanta groups—in major cities. While Paul did it for twelve years, Swamiji did it for about four years.

Paul and Vivekananda were both mystics. Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus is immersed in mysticism. There are many instances where Vivekananda also waited for some signal before acting. He once said: 'Most probably I will go to England very soon. But between you and me, I am a sort of mystic and cannot move without orders, and that has not come yet' (9.26). His decision to go to the US in 1893 was reinforced by a vision of Sri Ramakrishna beckoning him over the ocean. A similar event happened in Paul's life on the northern coast of the Aegean Sea. 'In a dream he saw a Macedonian from the other side of the sea, that is, in Europe, who was saying: "Come and help us!" It was the Europe of the future that was asking for the light and help of the gospel. On the impetus of this vision he set sail for Macedonia and thus entered Europe.'¹³

Both St Paul and Vivekananda were influenced by diverse cultures and philosophies. Paul was influenced by Greek culture, the Roman Empire, and of course by multiple divisions within Judaism. Swami Vivekananda was influenced by Vedic, Pauranic, Buddhist, and Western culture and philosophies. Paul was heavily influenced by Hellenistic language and culture; he wrote all his letters—or epistles as these are



‘SAINT PAUL WRITING HIS EPISTLES’. BY (PROBABLY) VALENTIN DE BOULOGNE (C.1618-20). OIL ON CANVAS / THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

commonly referred to—in Greek, not in Hebrew or Latin. He was born in the Roman province of Celicia, but was educated in Jerusalem. Vivekananda, though born in the bastion of Hindu orthodoxy, was exposed early to Islamic thought and was also influenced by Western ideas. His major compositions and lectures were all in English, except for a few essays in Bengali.

Paul and Vivekananda both were sports fans and used sports imagery and analogies in their writings and speeches to make a point. Hellenistic culture was sports-oriented, which is reflected in Paul's exhortations. There are many examples of that in the Bible, the best one probably being this: 'Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable garland, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air. But I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.'¹⁴

Vivekananda was influenced by a sports culture too. From an early age he joined a gymnasium in his neighbourhood. We are all aware of Vivekananda's wrestling, weightlifting, football, horse-riding, fighting with a staff, boxing, and cricket. To the youth he always stressed physical strength as not only a means to realize God but also to develop a character both personal and national. He did not mince words when he said:

First of all, our young men must be strong. Religion will come afterwards. Be strong, my young friends; that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita. These are bold words; but I have to say them, for I love you. I know where the shoe pinches. I have gained a little experience. You will understand the Gita



better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger. You will understand the mighty genius and the mighty strength of Krishna better with a little of strong blood in you. You will understand the Upanishads better and the glory of the Atman when your body stands firm upon your feet, and you feel yourselves as men. Thus we have to apply these to our needs.'¹⁵

There is no evidence that Paul used to participate in athletic activities—he could have—but he used athletic metaphors liberally to conjure up images in people's mind because they could relate to those in the Greco-Roman world. Vivekananda, on the other hand, was an athlete.

On the subject of letters a major part of Paul's teachings was through them, which became an integral and significant part of the New Testament—13 of the 27 books bear his name, although it is questioned whether he had authored



Welcome address to Swami Vivekananda (circled) in Calcutta, 28 February 1897

all of them. Mainly through these letters and chapters 9 to 28 of the ‘Acts of the Apostles’ we learn all about St Paul. Vivekananda also taught and preached through letters and lectures, which are consolidated in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, a bible of sorts for people who revere him. His letters, in which he dispensed directives to his disciples and brother disciples, especially the one he wrote to the members of Alambazar Math in April of 1896 from England (7.491–8), resemble Paul’s letters addressed to various churches.

The ability to persuade is one of the important characteristics of a leader; both Paul and Vivekananda were endowed with this quality. Vivekananda persuaded his brother disciples not to be consumed with the idea of their own moksha, liberation, but to work for the good and happiness of the many, serving all beings as God—*shiva-jnane jiva-seva*; serve jivas with the knowledge that they are Shiva—which was his Master’s wish. Paul also persuasively argued with established Christian leaders of his time—especially Peter, Cephas, John, and James—not to stray from the gospel. He wrote to the Galatians:

‘But when I saw that they [probably referring to the same four and others] were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”’¹⁶

It goes without saying that Paul’s loyalty and devotion to Jesus

was exemplary, and so was Vivekananda’s reverence for Christ. Thomas Á Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ* was Vivekananda’s constant companion during his travels, and so was the Bhagavad-gita. Vivekananda never made his love for Jesus Christ a secret. He expressed his fondness and admiration for the Nazarene in his comment: ‘Had I lived in Palestine, in the days of Jesus of Nazareth, I would have washed his feet, not with my tears, [referring to Luke, 7:38] but with my heart’s blood!’¹⁷

Though it has nothing to do with any attribute or incident, there is a minor subject where both Paul and Vivekananda had a similar preference: qualified non-vegetarianism. In his epistles, Paul legislated that non-vegetarianism was acceptable—contrary to the belief of the Essenes, a precursor order to Christianity, which practised vegetarianism—but he would not eat meat if it offended a member of the family who was vegetarian.¹⁸ His views on non-vegetarianism were more forceful when he said: ‘Some believe in eating anything [including meat], while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain

must not pass judgement on those who eat; for God has welcomed them.¹⁹

In his *The East and the West*, Vivekananda discusses this subject at length:

To eat meat is surely barbarous and vegetable food is certainly purer—who can deny that? For him surely is a strict vegetarian diet whose one end is to lead solely a spiritual life. But he who has to steer the boat of his life with strenuous labour through the constant life-and-death struggles and the competition of this world must of necessity take meat. So long as there will be in human society such a thing as the triumph of the strong over the weak, animal food is required, or some other suitable substitute for it has to be discovered; otherwise, the weak will naturally be crushed under the feet of the strong.²⁰

Some Differences

There are differences, of course. That is to be expected because both Paul and Vivekananda were products of their own times, and those were two millennia apart. But the differences are mainly in the realm of beliefs and dogmas, and we will not go through them in detail. We just mention that one was a Christian and the other a Hindu, or better, a Vedantist. While the Upanishads were in existence long before Paul's time, he, as far as we know, was not exposed to them. However, 'according to many great scholars, Christianity in both its early phases and later developments was directly influenced by Hindu religious ideas, as well as indirectly through Buddhism.'²¹ Vivekananda, on the other hand, was quite familiar with Christianity and the Bible,

and would not attach much significance to this outward difference. He frequently chastised Christians for not following Christ's core teachings, just as Paul would have done. Out of his own life experience, he said the following: 'I studied the Christian religion, the Mohammedan, the Buddhistic, and others, and what was my surprise to find that the same foundation principles taught by my religion were also taught by all religions. ... Whether a religion is taught in the forests and jungles of India or in a Christian land, in essentials all religions are one. This only shows us that religion is a constitutional necessity of the human mind. The proof of one religion depends on the proof of all the rest.'²²

The only difference in this regard may lie in the evangelical nature of their personalities and mission. Paul was promoting a new religion, which basically meant conversion. Vivekananda had a twofold mission: introduce the West to the Sanatana Dharma, which he preferred to call Vedantism and not Hinduism, and reinterpret this Hinduism from the Vedantic perspective, making it understandable,



pragmatic, and actionable. He was not interested in individual salvation in the afterlife, but stressed on our collective salvation here on Earth through service, compassion, and love to humanity. Vivekananda never wanted to convert anybody; he wanted Christians to be good Christians, to be true followers of Jesus Christ, whom he revered as an avatara. To him, Paul would have been a 'good Christian'.

There is no record of Paul proclaiming Christianity as the 'only true religion'. While preaching in Athens he told the Athenians: 'I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.'²³ He then went on to expound God's omnipresence. He was critical of idolatry because he believed that God does not live in temples but dwells in us. God is not 'unknown'; he is in all of us. Does Paul not sound like a Vedantist at times? In his epistles he never referred to himself or to other members of his 'faith communities' as 'Christians'. His 'call', or what people think of as conversion, never meant abandoning Judaism. He was proud to be a Jew and lived his entire life as one, just as Jesus Christ did.

Paul and Vivekananda also differ in their approach to sin, an important concept in Christianity. The former stated: 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.'²⁴ Paul was probably reminiscing about the days when he persecuted the followers of Christ with vengeance, prior to his mystical experience—the 'chief' of sinners became the chief of the apostles, what a conversion! Conversely, Vivekananda said: 'Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal

bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth—sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature. Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal; ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter.'²⁵

There is another subtle difference, related to their modes of receiving divine power. Vivekananda lived at his Master's feet for about five years, and before Sri Ramakrishna left the mortal world he transmitted his spiritual powers to Vivekananda saying: 'By the force of the power transmitted by me, great things will be done by you.'²⁶ In the case of Paul it is certain that he did not meet Jesus Christ during his earthly life. So, how did Paul know about Jesus's life on earth, his message and miracles? He was essentially a self-proclaimed apostle. Could it be that Jesus, the 'Risen One', transmitted his spiritual powers to Paul in a similar way on the road to Damascus? A mystic may think so, but there is no direct evidence of that, although Paul asserted: 'I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the Gospel I preach is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.'²⁷ Paul never offered any details of the incident.

In the realm of religions, beliefs, and dogmas it is natural to see a difference between these two great souls. A significant difference, however, appears in their approach to a social issue: attitude towards women. Whereas Vivekananda's clear views have been captured in his handwritten letters, public lectures, articles, and newspaper reports, one has to glean through the New Testament for Paul's views. Paul expressed his egalitarian view when he said: 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither

slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (3.28). But there are other statements that can be construed as misogyny. One example would be when he supposedly said: 'Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.'²⁸ The difference between Paul and Vivekananda could not have been any wider with respect to their individual views on women, if we believe Paul to be the source of these statements. Vivekananda said: 'The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women. In ancient Greece there was absolutely no difference in the state of man and woman. The idea of perfect equality existed. No Hindu can be a priest until he is married, the idea being that a single man is only half a man, and imperfect. The idea of perfect womanhood is perfect independence.'²⁹


Vivekananda went further: 'Women in statesmanship, managing territories, governing countries, even making war, have proved themselves equal to men—if not superior. In India I have no doubt of that. Whenever they have had the opportunity, they have proved that they have as much ability as men, with this advantage—that they seldom degenerate' (9.201). Vivekananda, who had studied the Bible deeply, must have known about Paul's comments on women. He said rather obliquely: 'The Aryan and Semitic ideal of woman ... have always been diametrically opposed. Amongst the Semites the presence of woman is considered dangerous to devotion, and she may not perform any religious function, even such as the killing of a bird for food: according to the Aryan a man cannot perform a religious action without a wife' (5.229).

Paul's views on women is surprising, but one must take into account that he was a product of

his time and place; he could have evolved with time, as some of his later comments would indicate. Women were important in the evangelizing movement that Paul organized, and indeed he respected them. He wrote:

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.³⁰

Mary Magdalene and other Jewish woman disciples of Jesus played prominent historical roles. Since there are contradictory views in the Bible about Paul's understanding of the role of women in the Church and elsewhere, one may not rush into characterizing him as a misogynist but grant him the benefit of doubt, accepting his egalitarian and inclusive vision of Christianity as his true position. There is always a possibility that some of Paul's apparently misogynistic statements were the result of post-Pauline interpolations and extrapolations by others.

The year 2008 was the 2000th birth anniversary of St Paul. On that occasion Pope Benedict XVI said: 'The figure of Saint Paul towers far above his earthly life and his death; in fact, he left us an extraordinary spiritual heritage.'³¹ In 2014 we are celebrating the concluding phase of Swami Vivekananda's 150th birth anniversary. We can all say about him the same thing the Pope said of St Paul, because we are being constantly nourished by Vivekananda's utterances, letters, teachings, and spirituality. 

(References on page 298)

Acharya Shankara: Delineator of India

Dr V Vasanthakumari

THERE IS AN INCREASING demand for an account of Acharya Shankara's life. This is because of his influence on the religious, cultural, and philosophical life of India. There are different views regarding Acharya Shankara's birthplace, where he met his guru, when and where he wrote the *bhashyas*, commentaries, as well as the places he travelled. Some of this information is available in different books; among them Madhva-Vidyaranya's *Shankara Digvijaya* in Sanskrit is considered a unique historical and philosophical poem. An attempt is made here to show Acharya Shankara as the delineator of India according to his travels. Many temples and shrines, even today, all over the country bear testimony to his efforts towards national integration.

The Great Parivrajaka

Maps were used since ancient times for knowing locations, travel, and trade. These were prepared according to the importance of the regions. In the eleventh century CE the Persian Alu Rayhan Biruni visited India, studied its geography extensively, and wrote about its history and geology. In 1767 the East India Company established the Survey of India for mapping Indian territories, and the first map of 'Hindustan' was prepared by the then Surveyor General in 1785.

In the eighth century Acharya Shankara gave us another kind of India's map through his journeys, in which he propagated the Advaita philosophy. This is confirmed from his own works and those of other contemporary teachers and acharyas. Through these works we have a picture of the social, cultural, and philosophical life of

the country. During Acharya Shankara's time the means of transport were very limited. He is generally shown travelling mostly on foot, which today seems dreadful, but it was a victory march for Advaita Vedanta. The Acharya travelled like all ordinary pilgrims had done for centuries: meeting dangers, eating whatever was available, and resting at any convenient place. However, being a *paramahansa parivrajaka*, the supreme stage of a wandering sannyasin, he was the symbol of the highest spiritual experience a human being can achieve, and thus he travelled and lived as one.

After receiving permission to become a sannyasi from his mother, he started his journey from Kalady in the centre of Kerala, where he was born, towards the north in search of a guru. He eventually reached the river Narmada near Omkareshvar, now in Madhya Pradesh, where he met Govinda Bhagavatpada and accepted him as his guru. How a young boy travelled such a long distance from Kerala to Omkareshvar amazes people even today. Here he composed and recited the *Narmada-ashtaka* praising Narmada. From here he travelled to Kashi, or Varanasi, through Prayaga, or Allahabad, both in present-day Uttar Pradesh. Kashi is known as the *moksha-puri*, city of liberation, and is visited by a large number of seekers of liberation as well as pundits. In Kashi he stayed at the Manikarnika Ghat and wrote the *Manikarnika-ashtakam*. Acharya Shankara also wrote here the *Manisha-panchakam* and various hymns on Shiva. At Varanasi he met Padmapada, his first disciple.

After travelling long distances through difficult and dangerous forest tracks, he reached the

holy Badrinath, or Badri-Narayana, in the Himalayas, now in Uttarakhand. Here he wrote all his sublime *bhashyas*. His route to Badrinath took him through Hasthinapura, Delhi, Haridwar, and Rishikesh. Badarikashrama is modern Badrinath, a village fifty-five miles northeast of the present Srinagar, in Uttarakhand. From there, after finishing writing the *bhashyas* and discovering lost shrines in the Himalayas, he returned to Kashi. There in Kashi he met, in a divine vision, Vyasa, the author of the *Brahma Sutra*, who quizzed the acharya regarding his interpretation on the text. After being blessed by Vyasa he started his journey to Prayaga, where the rivers Ganga and Yamuna mingle, to meet Kumarila Bhatta, the great Mimamsaka versed in the 'Karma Kanda', ritual section, of the Vedas. After visiting holy places like Kurukshetra, Indraprastha, and Mathura he reached Vrindavan, where he wrote the *Govinda-ashtakam*. Acharya Shankara and his disciples then returned to Prayaga. From there they travelled to the city of Mahishmati, in Madhya Pradesh, to meet Mandana Mishra. Mandana was defeated by Acharya Shankara in a debate and became his disciple, Sureshvara. Mandana's wife Uma Bharati was the moderator of the debate.

Dig-Vijaya, Conquest of the Quarters

Acharya Shankara passed through Maharashtra, where he propagated his doctrines and controverted non-Vedic creeds. Stage by stage he reached a great place of pilgrimage called Shrishailam on the banks of the river Krishna, in Andhra Pradesh. Shrishailam is famous for its peaks and a Shiva temple known as Mallikarjuna along with that of Bhramara-ambika. This is narrated by the Acharya in a stotra.¹

From Shrishailam the Acharya and his disciples reached the holy place of Gokarna, in Karnataka, on the seashore and visited Hari-shankara Kshetra too. After having adored and

praised Hari-Shankara he proceeded further south to the shrine of Mookambika, which is eighty miles away from Mangalore. Adoring the Divine Mother as Mookambika he stayed there for many days. Even now there is a cave believed to be the one used by Acharya Shankara on his way to the temple.

From Mookambika he voyaged to the village of Sreebali, a village of brahmanas where every house performed the Vedic Agnihotra yajna. There he met Hastamalaka, who became his disciple. With his disciples he then travelled to Sringeri near the river Tungabhadra, where he met the disciple Totaka. While at Sringeri the Acharya had a yogic insight about his mother's last days. Telling this to his disciples he then travelled to Kalady to see her for the last time.

After performing the last rites to his mother, he started on a *digvijaya*, conquest of the quarters. At first he travelled through Ananta-shayana, modern Thiruvananthapuram, Suchindram, Kanyakumari, Tiruchirappalli, and reached Rameshwaram, where he worshipped Ramanatha Shiva.²

As a symbol of his visit, a shrine of Acharya Shankara was built between the temple of the Devi and the bathing ghat at end of India, Kanyakumari. It is claimed that his *Saundaryalahari* was written at Kanyakumari—some of



Vidyashankara temple
at Sringeri, Karnataka

its verses can be considered as an evidence of it being composed there, like: ‘The dust of your feet is the island city from where takes place the luminous sunrise of spiritual illumination driving away the overcasting darkness of ignorance in the hearts of devotees.’³ In this verse the word *dvipa-nagari* denotes cape Kanyakumari. The forty-eighth verse states: ‘Oh mother, your right eye being the sun creates day and your left being the moon creates night.’ In India both the sunrise and sunset can be seen only at Kanyakumari. On the full moon days the setting sun and rising moon can be simultaneously seen at Kanyakumari. However, tradition has it that the Acharya transported himself to Kailash and there on the wall found written this hymn to the Divine Mother. As he read it, Ganesha began erasing the hymn from below so that the highly esoteric meaning was not made public in this world.

The images of Shan Mata, six deities, ratify that Acharya Shankara visited the temple at Suchindram. His composition *Panduranga-ashtakam* in praise of Ranganatha mentions his

visit to the temple at Tiruchirappalli. He journeyed through the Pandya and Chola countries and reached Kanchipuram, which shone like an ornament to the Hasthi ranges.⁴

Again entering Andhra Pradesh and worshipping Venkatanatha, he reached the land of Vidarbha in eastern Maharashtra. After this he headed for Karnataka and reached Gokarnam, north Karnataka, and defeated Nilakantha, the great Shaiva saint. He then travelled to Saurashtra in Gujarat and adjacent places, to finally reach the city of Dwaraka.⁵

After having defeated in arguments the sects of Vaishnavas, Shaivas, Shaktas, and Sauras he proceeded to the city of Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh. There he defeated in a debate the great scholar Bhattabhaskara. He spread his teachings in the country of Surasena in Uttar Pradesh, and subsequently he had triumphant tours through the lands of Darada, in the Kashmir valley along the river Sindhu; Bharata and Kuru, in the area of Haryana, Delhi and western Uttar Pradesh; Panchala, in the northern regions along the Ganga and the Yamuna; and others. In Panchala he defeated the followers of Prabhakara Bhatta and Harsha. From there the Acharya went to Kamarupa in Assam, where he was victorious over Navagupta, a Shakta thinker. There is a shrine of Acharya Shankara at Kamakhya temple in Assam.

Acharya Shankara finished his preaching in the northern region and then proceeded through the lands of Koshal in Uttar Pradesh, Anga—which was in the eastern part of India in the sixth century until it was taken over by Magadha, Bihar—to Gauda, Bengal. In Gauda he won over scholars like Murari Mishra and Udayana and triumphed over Dharmagupta. He reached the banks of the Ganga, where he heard about *sarvajna pitha*, the seat of omniscience, at the Sharada temple in Kashmir. So he went to



Dwarkadhish temple
at Dwaraka, Gujarat



Kashmir, and after many debates won the seat. After this crowning triumph he left for Badrinath with some of his disciples, while deputing others to Sringeri and other places. The acharya also went to Kedarnath, the holy place of Shiva in the Himalayas. He never returned from there and, according to legend, he merged in Shiva.

Culmination of a Great Life


Within his short lifespan of thirty-two years, his doctrine of *brahma-vidya*, knowledge of Brahman, which confers moksha, spread all over the country, from Rameshwaram in the south to the northern boundaries marked by the Himalayas, from the eastern mountains where the sun rises to those of the west where it sets.

His discussions were not confirmed to the upper castes. There were men and women of all castes and classes who had engaged in discussion with him. Even the difference of language between the north and south did not prove a barrier to this interaction. His interactions with different scholars in Sanskrit, which was the common language of the learned throughout the country, helped bring out the essential unity of India even during that time.

Thus the sublime teachings of Advaita Vedanta were defended by his tremendous spirituality. Acharya Shankara remodelled Hinduism and eradicated Buddhism, which in India had degenerated, along with numerous ritualistic sects that had swerved from the path of the Vedas.

*Badrinarayana temple
at Badrinath, Uttarakhand*

In order to safeguard the principles and teachings of Advaita and also to culturally unite India he established four Mathas, monasteries, at four different parts of India—Sringeri in the south, Dwaraka in the west, Puri in the east, and Jyoti near Badrinath in the north. If we join these four places we get a square. Interestingly, Rameshwaram in the south and Badrinath in the north lie on the same longitude; similarly, Dwaraka and Puri lie on the same latitude, approximately having the same distance. His *Jagannatha-ashtakam* describes his visit to Puri in Odisha, which is also known as Jagannatha-puri.⁶

His stotras evince his visits to these places. While reading them one has the impression that he was standing in front of the deities when he composed and sang them. The verbs are in present tense. His works narrate the sacred places of pilgrimage—the icy cave of Amarnath, Prayaga, Ganga, Dwaraka, and so on. They also give an insight into old Indian temple architecture and art. His works also reveal his genius and vision of the geographical and cultural unity of India. From all this we can affirm that Acharya Shankara is the delineator of India. 

References

1. Acharya Shankara, *Bhramarapakashtakam*, 1.
2. See Acharya Shankara, *Dvadasha-linga Stotra*, 11.
3. See Acharya Shankara, *Saundarya Lahari*, 3.
4. See Vidyananya, *Shankara-digvijaya*, 15.4.
5. See *Dvadasha-linga Stotra*, 1.
6. See Acharya Shankara, *Jagannathashtakam*, 3.





Pilgrimage to Mount Kailash

Swami Damodarananda

THIS IS A STORY, after about sixty years, of my walking all the way to Mount Kailash and back.

Every religion has its prophets, saints, sages, sacred places, and holy days of special worship. Devotees of all religions do pilgrimages as an act of purification. These acts are accompanied with prayers, worship, and meditation. Bharata, that is India, is filled with many sacred places—from Kanyakumari in the south, to Kamakhya in the east; from Badrinath-Kedarnath in the north, to Dwarkanath-Somnath in the west; and Vishvanath at Varanasi sits in the centre. Thus lakhs of devotees, since ancient times, have availed of the ample opportunities to offer their devotions to the innumerable sacred places dedicated to God in the form of thousands of gods and goddesses. Pilgrimages and prayers lead one to a better and nobler life, with deeper spiritual insights and perceptions. In a way, a pilgrimage reflects the journey, often hard, of human life to its goal—God.

In 1947, after the partition of India, I returned as a refugee, along with the others, from

our Lahore centre, which is now in Pakistan. Posted to the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindavan, I was trained to offer seva in almost all the hospital departments. I finally ended up being a radiologist.

Badrinath

In 1952 there arose in me a strong desire to go on a pilgrimage to Badrinath, also known as Badri-Narayana, and Kedarnath. I requested Swami Madhavananda, the then general secretary, permission to fulfil my desire. Revered Maharaj did grant me permission, after a brief exchange of correspondence, through Swami Kripananda, head of the Sevashrama. I began preparing for the pilgrimage by collecting warm clothing, a stout *lathi*, stick, a *kamandalu*, sadhu's water pot, and so on. Sometime in July I started from Vrindavan for New Delhi and from there to Haridwar and Rishikesh.

At Rishikesh revered Jagabandhu Maharaj, Swami Nityatmananda, was doing tapasya in one of our *kutias*, huts. I was fortunate to stay with him for three or four days. Before leaving I

requested him to bless me so that by Sri Ramakrishna's grace I should have a safe, enjoyable, and fruitful *yatra*, journey. The swami immediately reminded me that both Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, being on our right and left side respectively, are ever protecting and looking after us. This holy attitude further fortified my love and devotion for Sri Thakur and Sri Ma. In retrospect, it helped give me a deeper spiritual insight and safely brought me back to Bharata, the divine spiritual land, after a terribly difficult *yatra* facing unforeseen deadly circumstances and problems.

The next day I crossed the Laxman Jhulla Bridge at Rishikesh to start my climb through the winding mountain roads. I slowly made my way up and down the mountains and reached Vasishtha Guha, where Swami Purushottamanda, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, was staying. Having stayed with him for a day or so, and after receiving his blessing, I moved onwards and upwards. At every ten to fifteen miles I came across a *chatti*, rest house. These *chattis* were equipped with basic facilities for shelter, provisions, cooking, eating, and sleeping.

Somewhere, as suggested by friends, I branched off at Govind Ghat to go to Hemkund Lokpal, the huge holy lake where Govind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, meditated for spiritual illumination. Near the glacier and the freezing lake there was a small Gurudwara, where no one lived. I could hear the mountain's ice cracking and falling into the huge lake. The icy water flowed down through a stream.

As I was returning from there, I happened to pass through a vast area of natural wild flowers called the Valley of Flowers. The sight of a staggering variety of flowers, medicinal herbs, and roots was so powerful that even now, after all these decades, it flashes forth and is quite fresh in my mind.

I returned to the main road leading to the Badrinath shrine, reaching in due course Joshi Math, or Jyotir Math, one of the four Maths established by Acharya Shankara. He established this Math for the dissemination of Vedanta in the northern parts of India. The other Maths Acharya Shankara established are at Puri in the east, Dwarka in the west, and Sringeri in the south.

Finally, moving upwards from Joshi Math, I reached Badrinath within a day or two. It is situated on the banks of the Alakananda River, a tributary of the Ganga. It is said that the image of Badri-Narayana was thrown into the river by the Buddhists and Buddha's image was installed in its place. Later Acharya Shankara arrived at Badrinath and discovered, through his spiritual insight, the image of Narayana lying in the Alakananda, further purifying the holy water of the Ganga. The Acharya immediately made all arrangements to lift Bhagavan's image and reinstall it. This was done with all due Vedic rites by priests especially brought from the Malabar area in South India. This tradition still continues and hence the temple priests are brahmanas from Malabar.

Every morning I used to bathe in the tank called *tapta-kunda*, a hot water spring, which issues out of the ground. After bathing I would go straight to the temple and sit on one of the built-in stone benches, constructed on both sides of the temple prayer hall. I used to sit opposite the learned priests who repeated the *Vishnu Sahasranama Stotra*. With prayer book in hand I would join them in the recitation. This sacred recitation went on throughout the *abhishekam*, holy bath, of the image of Narayana. The *abhishekam* consist of *pancha-amrita*—milk, curds, ghee, honey, and sugar. Finally, everything is washed away by pouring pure water to keep the holy image clean and sparkling. Then detailed decorations followed with sandal paste, coloured powder, various perfumes, clothes, ornaments,

and flowers. After this ceremony the screen was drawn aside, as the deity was ready to receive the devotees' darshan.

In most of the pilgrim places situated in the Himalayas free food is offered to the visiting monks by various charitable organizations. The most famous among them is 'Kali Kamliwala Chhatra'. I used to stand in the queue, along with the other visiting monks, for the *bhiksha*, holy alms. In the evening as well we would obtain supper from there, which we then took to our *kutias* to eat at leisure.

Kedarnath

From Badrinath I began walking through dangerous terrain towards Kedarnath, the abode of Shiva on the banks of the Mandakini River, another tributary of the Ganga. It is at a higher altitude than Badrinath and also much colder. The snow-capped peaks are just a little further away behind the temple. Once, when I dared to walk in the evening towards the glaciers, I saw a sadhu sitting and meditating. This was dangerous, as a cold wind was blowing—unless the constitution is very strong, one might end up in deep absorption and enter final samadhi. Hence, in such situations it is always safer to meditate inside one's room or the Shiva temple.

Being anxious to earn more *punya*, merit, one day at about ten in the morning I went down to bathe in the Mandakini. I knew full well that the water was too cold—minus 10 or 20 degrees centigrade. I thought I could have a quick dip and come out. But once I jumped in and was in the freezing waters, my body became numb. At that time the only thought was to save myself by coming out of the water before I froze. Somehow, with ebbing strength, I emerged out of the water by the grace of Kedareshwara Mahadeva—Shiva—and was saved from the terrible calamity of freezing into *mahasamadhi* in the Mandakini.

After this incident I was inspired to spend more time with Shiva in the temple—praying, meditating, and reciting hymns. Thus enjoying my ever-inspiring holy pilgrimage, I returned to Badrinath after a few days planning for my *yatra* to Mount Kailash.

Meanwhile, I joined some pilgrims that were going to the Tunganath Mahadeva temple, to the east of Badrinath. This temple was also established by Acharya Shankara when he was discovering the sacred shrines in the Himalayas. This temple is one of the Pancha Kedars, five Kedar temples; situated at the height of about 12,000 feet it is the highest among the five Shiva temples. I found it to be sparsely populated. The altitude and freezing cold dissuades people from living there. Only those appointed for temple work and its management stayed there, apart from the few pilgrims, despite all the difficulties.

Towards Tibet

After visiting and offering obeisance to Badrinath, Kedarnath, and Tunganath, I set out for holy Kailash and Manasarovar. I was told that there were two passes to enter Tibet. One near Badrinath called Mana Pass and the other called Niti Pass. Mana Pass is at a very high altitude, and pilgrims opting to go through it have to face a lot of difficulties while climbing the steep slopes. As such I was advised to go through the Niti Pass, which being lower was easier to negotiate, but would entail an extra week of travel. Another attraction of this route for me was that on the way there is Kalpeshwara Shiva temple, situated at the height of about 7,200 feet.

I prepared *chattu*, powdered fried Bengal gram, to last me for about a week. *Chattu* has to be taken along with water and salt. I took this, along with fruits if available, when I became hungry. Thus I walked along a narrow

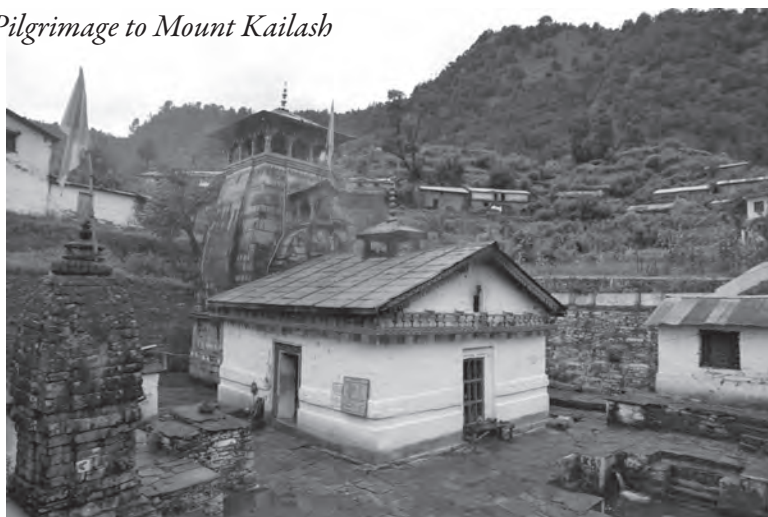
stream through cultivated terraced fields, higher and higher, finally reaching the small temple of Kalpeshwara Shiva. It seemed some saints had performed tapasya there earlier.

After offering my prayers at the temple and seeing a house nearby, I slowly made my way towards it. It consisted of one big room. Different items required for the simple house were kept in different corners of the house.

Only one woman was there suckling her baby, who was lying on the lap, and at the same time cooking at the hearth in the centre of the house. A steel plate for baking bread was placed on it. She was preparing rotis without a rolling pin, expertly stretching the dough with both her hands. As she placed the roti on the plate, it began baking and puffing up, the woman offered the hot flattened bread to me saying in Hindi, '*baba-lo*', Baba please take! She also gave me a preparation of some vegetables to go along with the rotis.

After eating the *bhiksha* I thanked and took leave of her to climb higher in the mountains. Thus I walked on and on, up and down the mountains, through one terraced hill of cultivation to the next, but always higher and higher.

There were very few pilgrims going to Mount Kailash during those days. I was walking alone, not knowing the path to cross over to Tibet. Under these circumstances I was told to follow the shepherds with flocks of goats and sheep. These shepherds inhabited the mountainous regions bordering India and Tibet. During the summer they work as tradesmen, plying their trade between India and Tibet. They were hardy and used to climbing high altitudes and precipitous mountain paths with ease. These rugged



Kalpeshwar Shiva temple

and brave people were used to facing all sorts of unusual challenges. Their principal vocation was to rear sheep, goats, yaks, mules, and horses, which they used for carrying heavy loads of articles such as rice, dal, salt, and other household needs. They also traded in beads and other items used by women as ornaments, as these items were not available in Tibet. They packed these articles in jute bags and carried them on the backs of animals to Tibet. In exchange they brought to India rolls of wool, packed on both sides of the mules and horses for feeding the woollen mills of North India, which prepare woollen garments.

So I joined one such group of traders and, halting for a day, rested in their tents. I was kindly given a corner to rest. Of course I ate my *chattu* with water and salt while they ate meat by killing one of the old or weak animals—either sheep or goat. As they did this, they asked me to move away and look elsewhere.

Thus climbing on to higher altitudes, we reached the Indian police check post. The last climb before the check post was very steep. Even the yaks and horses were panting! No one is allowed to go to Tibet without permission from the Indian Government. The police asked me for the permit. I told them that I was a pilgrim

to Kailash and Manasarovar. They doubted me because I was a young monk of thirty-five years. They thought I was a communist in a monk's garb, trying to escape to China for getting indoctrination and training in communist ideas. I told them my name and that I belonged to the Ramakrishna Mission, presently serving at the Sevashrama at Vrindavan. I also showed them a letter addressed to me, care of the Sevashrama in Vrindavan.

Finally, being convinced of my genuineness, they allowed me to continue across the border. They told me however to return to India by the same Niti Pass. But, as circumstances unfolded in the course of my pilgrimage, I had to return to India through a different route, the precipitous Hoti Pass. I reached the Tibetan plateau with my shepherd friends and crossed the Tibetan check post.

The Tibetan Plateau and Mandi

The Dalai Lamas ruled from Lhasa. There were ancient cultural and other ties between the two countries. India was loosely governing the Tibetans, perhaps mostly due to the Hindu pilgrims going every year to Mount Kailash.

The Tibetan plateau is the highest in the world, covering a vast land. The average altitude of the plateau is 10,000 feet above sea level. I began walking onwards along with the shepherds, who were doing business with the Tibetans, supplying them with several items they carried from the foothills of the Himalayas to the plateau of Tibet.

From the Tibetan check post we proceeded further to reach a *mandi*, temporary summer market place, where Indian goods were being exchanged for wool. All exchanges were done according to the barter system. Wool was the only wealth of Tibet exchangeable for Indian goods. There were many tents in that summer bazaar.

Fortunately there was no rain and the sun was bright. In this weather the Tibetans came from various parts to exchange their goods. It was the once-in-a-year opportunity to trade.

I was in one of the tents where business with the Tibetans was going on. There a young man came to exchange some goods with the Indian trader. I saw the young man's eyes were red. I realized he had an eye infection. Since I was working in the Vrindavan Eye Hospital, I had carried a first-aid box in case of emergency. Working in the hospital had given me knowledge about the use of medicines. My first-aid box contained some antibiotic tablets, sulphamylamide powder, and some medicine for eye problems. I wanted to help this young man by giving some medicines, which I conveyed to the tradesman who knew the Tibetan language. I explained that his eyes had become red because of some infection and that I had medicines that I could give him. He should apply the medicine three times a day. The Tibetan looked at me and told me through the tradesman that he would go to his tent and be back. In a little while the man returned with a leather bundle, which he offered to me in exchange of the medicines. The Indian trader explained to me that Tibetans do not accept anything freely given by sadhus, that they would like to give me something in return. The young man brought a gift shaped like a football in a leather bag. The 'football' was nothing but sheep or yak or goat's butter, which does not melt due to the cold and the leather package. I accepted the leather bag and the young man accepted the medicines and bid me goodbye by saying 'namaste'. Tibet, being a Buddhist country, has much respect for monks and has developed a sense of charity that is part of their religion and daily life.

In general Buddhists are very generous and charitable. The attitude of the young man bears

testimony to this fact. Here I can mention another incident that happened when I was going to Mandalay, the old capital of Burma. I was travelling by boat on the river Irawati. It was lunch time and a Burmese mother, a fellow traveller, came to me and did pranams. She conveyed in gestures, as I did not know her language, to take lunch. As I had eaten to my full, I had no desire to eat then, which I conveyed to her again in signs, thanking her for the offer by doing namaste. I want to reiterate here that Buddhist people are very hospitable and charitable to monks and nuns, whichever denomination he or she may belong to.

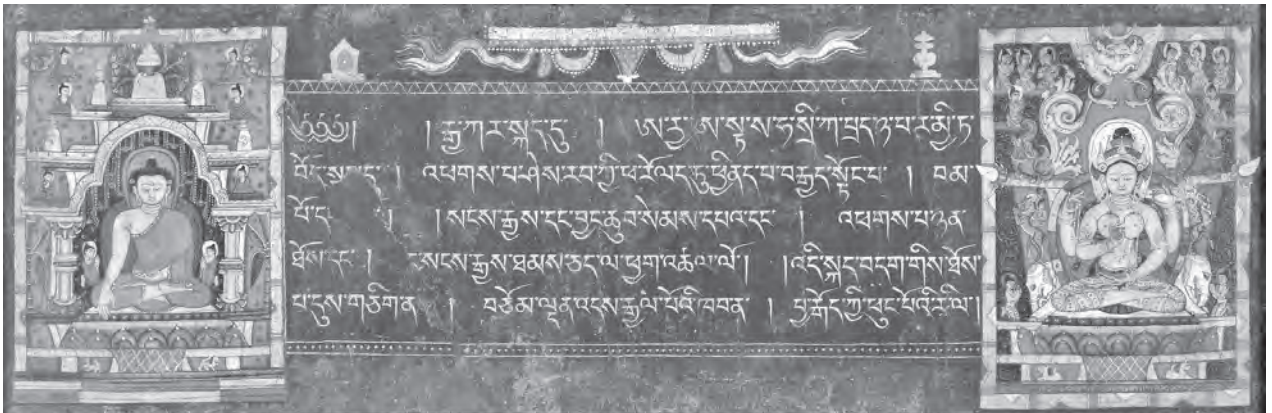
I met some Tibetans who told me that there was a great holy place in a town called Manglang. It was a Buddhist pilgrim centre situated in the extreme west of the Tibetan plateau. I was told that on the eastern part of the Tibetan plateau is located the holy Manasarovar Lake and Mount Kailash. After obtaining some more information about the route, I set out to the western part of Tibet to reach Manglang. Since it was a beaten track, I had no difficulty in finding the way, except for walking long hours. I was alone and did not see any human beings—only goats, sheep, and yaks. The whole place was barren.

Around seven in the evening I reached the Buddhist temple in Manglang. As soon as I entered the temple the monks saw me. They welcomed and offered me cheese and sheep milk, which is available in plenty, along with salted hot tea. Their way of making cottage cheese is very simple: by exposing the goat's or sheep's milk in the scorching sun it gets split into whey and cheese; due to heat the water evaporates and the cheese is thus naturally formed. Since I was a vegetarian, they gave me cheese with the salted tea available always in the tents and temples. As that is a cold country, they did not drink water and instead drank salted tea.

After filling my stomach and getting over my tiredness, I went to the temple. I saw there a huge Buddha statue twenty feet high, seated on a chair, as it were. Surrounding this huge Buddha image they had decorated small images of Buddha in a meditative posture. Everywhere and in every corner in the huge temple, between the images, plenty of manuscripts in Tibetan were lying here and there along with smaller Buddha images. I asked them about the manuscripts and they told me that they were manuscripts of Buddhism. So I rested there and meditated in that huge temple.

(To be concluded)

'Buddha Shakyamuni and Prajnaparamita', leaf from a Prajnaparamita (Perfection of Wisdom) manuscript, written in Tibetan



Concluding Programme of Swami Vivekananda's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebrations: A Retrospect

Swami Satyamayananda

I WAS PLEASANTLY SURPRISED on arriving at Belur Math. That surprise slowly changed many of my perceptions regarding Swami Vivekananda and his message. Throughout my long journey I tried to keep down the feeling that Swamiji was drawing many like me to Belur Math to attend the function. As I entered Belur Math, the sacred place from where Swamiji said waves of spirituality would envelop the world, I knew my feelings were right.

The second thing that struck me most was my perception of bigness. Everything looked immense—the place, temples, thousands of people streaming in, decorations, and pandals. I too kept feeling tall and began straightening. A novel thought struck me: Swamiji's personality, message, and power, were massive. It was meant for giants ten feet tall. It took pygmy-like people like me and the thousands of others and made them big. Swamiji himself was like that. Swami Atulananda, who met Swamiji, reminisced:

Swamiji was so simple in his behaviour, so like one of the crowd that he did not impress me so much when I first saw him. ... He walked about the room, sat on the floor, laughed, joked, chatted—nothing formal. ... But when I saw him for a few minutes standing on the platform surrounded by others, it flashed into my mind: 'What a giant, what strength, what manliness, what a personality! Everyone near him looks so insignificant compared with him.' It came to me almost as a shock, it seemed to startle me. ... I felt that Swamiji had unlimited power, that he could move heaven and earth if he willed it.¹

The people were drawn to a massive stage on which Swamiji presided—in the picture of his taken at Belgaum—in all his glory. Those who surrounded him now did not look insignificant. He himself had said: 'It may be that I shall find it good to get outside my body—to cast it off like a disused garment. But I shall not cease to work! I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know it is one with God.'² Swamiji





has been working since to raise us up, and that is why the idea of bigness was apparent. All those who assembled here at Belur Math, ordinary people ignited with a burning fire, must have not made a big impact in their milieu, but as they converged to Belur Math, their real stature was immediately apparent. These people—devotees, students, pundits, volunteers, monks, nuns—having gone through many struggles and sacrifices, now seemed irrepressible, giants. The secret of their stature was that they had imbibed some aspect of Swamiji's fire, which changed their lives. All these assembled people were instinctively paying homage to their great ideal, who transformed their insignificant lives to significant ones.

Another thing that struck me almost immediately was the air of festivity. There was nothing artificial about it. A current of joy ran all around. The people working to make the event flawless worked with smiles on their faces. Fatigue took

a backseat as they saw the steady stream of happy people pouring through the gates—they were there to celebrate. It was with joy that they had first entered Swamiji's message. Those few days would make them enter and participate even more deeply in Swamiji.

The infrastructure set up to cater and make comfortable the delegates and visitors, was fully geared to handle the many demands on itself. The monks and volunteers managing the machinery had planned and rehearsed things down to the smallest detail. Those looking after the feeding were up all night trying to keep food ready and waiting for the thousands of hungry devotees, delegates, and the youth. The platoon of people in charge of keeping the place clean and tidy were up and doing the whole day and part of the night. Almost every need was promptly met and gratefully acknowledged. It was this army of silent workers in the background of the main festivities that carried the day.





For four years, starting from Swamiji's birthday in 2010, the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission along with numerous organizations—monastic and non-monastic, big and small—had implemented various schemes drawn up by the Order and endorsed by the Government of India. The government provided majority of the funds and support also came from many private and public donors. The main thrust was to make Swamiji relevant to modern India's various growing needs. The government had also involved all its state, bureaucratic, administrative, and educational machinery, including its foreign missions, to this task. All private schools and colleges too were requested to celebrate Swamiji's birth anniversary. Hence Swamiji's life-giving message reached people from the tribal areas to the elite in megacities. Literature, pictures, posters, Ratha Yatras—chariot processions—public meetings, cultural programmes, competitions in schools and colleges, door-to-door canvassing, and so on involved and engaged a great many people. Such a national celebration was unprecedented.

Sister Nivedita wrote, in a prescient mood, these words to Josephine MacLeod in 1906: 'I can see that the era of the world workers is quickly passing away, but I do think we ought to have a nucleus in Europe before the movement of Ramakrishna settles down to the silent

thought germination which must come. ... You see, when we who understood Swamiji, and remember Him are dead, there will come a long period of obscurity and silence, for the work that He did, it will *seem* to be forgotten, until, suddenly, in 150 or 200 years, it will be found to have transformed the West.'³ This is literally coming true. These celebrations were not the concluding phase of Swami Vivekananda's 150 years but the beginning of the new era of his message to the world. The world is discovering, to its joy, that Swamiji's message is ideal and timely for its future growth. It has also put a heavy burden of responsibility on the people assembled there. They needed Swamiji's strength now more than ever.


The functions started on the 19 January 2014 and were inaugurated by Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Swami Suhitananda, the general secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, welcomed the huge assembly. The two Vice Presidents of the Order, Revered Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj and Revered Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, spoke on the occasion. Sri Subrata Mukherjee, a minister from the West Bengal Government, also spoke and later inaugurated the exhibitions on 'National Integration through Arts and Crafts' and 'Life and Message of Swami Vivekananda' set up on the grounds. Throughout the

celebrations thousands of enthralled people visited these exhibitions.

Various cultural programmes were performed every day in the afternoons and evenings on all the days. Artistes from different parts of the country enthralled and engaged the audiences and promoted the arts, which Swamiji was so fond of. On the 25 and 26 January there was a huge concourse of devotees assembled for the devotees' convention. There was a veritable feast of fine discourses, musical recitals, and cultural programmes. In the five sessions new lines of thoughts were placed before the devotees, which made them happy and proud to have been present on this occasion. All these resident and non-resident devotees were delegates from over the country. Those coming from afar were accommodated in the various hostels of the Order's centres of Saradapith and Vivekananda University.

An international seminar on 27 and 28 January, inaugurated by Sri M K Narayanan, governor of West Bengal, was a high point in the proceedings. The papers presented by eminent pundits and monks and the level of discussions were of high quality. One wondered how Swamiji's message has so many ramifications in so many areas, for so many people. The 29 and 30 January was kept reserved for the youth. They had come from all over the country to participate in the youth convention. Swamiji loved the youth and had faith in them to carry forwards

his message. They came eager and energetic and received a lot of inspiration from the six sessions. Ms Mamata Banerjee, chief minister of West Bengal, spoke with vigour at the special session on the first day.

All through the various sessions one was acutely aware of Swamiji's looming presence on the stage—it was humbling and yet ennobling, silent yet powerful. One hundred and fifty lamps were lit at the inaugural session, and I wondered how many more lamps will be lit in the future—200, 250, 300. ... These lamps would mark the passage of each of the years in which his presence and power will grow in the world. Belur Math also has grown—physically, in importance, and spiritually too—and yet one also wonders if there will be enough space to place all the lamps, more powerful than ever, in the distant future. For these lamps will draw, like a flotilla of boats, the numerous buses, trains, and planes, more and more people—giants—to Swamiji's holy feet. 

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The Many-splendoured Vivekananda's Vedanta

Dr M Sivaramkrishna

(Continued from the previous issue)

TO REFINE, PURIFY, AND retrieve one has to choose a tenor and a vehicle. You require a vehicle of communication and a tenor of thought. This sustains the aims of a text to evoke the deeper layers of psyche and, at the same time, relate these layers to those that deal with the other, more secular, layers. Shruti and Smriti texts have to be interlinked; the accretions in both needed surgery. Radical changes came as a result of colonial regimes. The initial move to India was not by colonists; it was by merchants, the East India Company, whose primary aim was profit. Only later the formal entry of British rule came. Together they created an ethos that eventually threatened to dislodge indigenous traditions. This is a historical fact. But what is bypassed is the very nature of Indic traditions. Every version of Indic traditions has a subversion organically built into it. The result is prevention of the version from becoming a perversion. This is not a play on words, for the traditions are subjected to selective cleansing.

Vivekananda in Context

Discussing the intellectual history of India and its phases vis-à-vis the impact of the colonial rule, Christopher Bayly suggests: 'Rammohan Roy and his descendants in Madras and Bombay developed their own Indian version of the "ancient constitution" to empower a new Indian public sphere in which to oppose the racial despotism of the East India Company.'¹⁵

Bayly adds: 'This short period marked a crucial rupture in the history of ideas.' He feels that ideas such as 'liberty, sociability, and humanity were transformed and even deepened in the Indian context.' Simultaneously, says Bayly, 'ideas previously regarded as "Indian" were projected on to a world-historical stage and found resonances and disciples in the West. The careers of Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, and Mahatma Gandhi were testimony to the outward journey' (ibid.).

Perhaps this analysis is true and applicable in certain contexts, but not wholly to Vivekananda. What he did to Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions is not a projection or construction of an identity. He never visualized a break. What he did was—it seems to me—something much more significant. He drew from Sri Ramakrishna the truths of experiential spirituality, which are generically human and universal. In other words, he sculpted a holistic paradigm of global development that is just and humane. It created a sharing of the methodologies of outsourcing that are familiar to us now. He was a spiritual surgeon who used the scalpel of Hindu wisdom to target a globalized order of peace and harmony. The anaesthetic was his own 'usable past'.

In his address at the Indian House, New York, in honour of Swamiji's Birth Centenary in 1953, Ainslee Embree pointed out: 'Following his Master Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda accepted the Hindu tradition in all its complexity and

richness, defending at times precisely those features which reformers of all kinds ... had found most distasteful.¹⁶ These practices included idol worship, caste system, and other controversial areas. Not only was Swamiji's defence realistic, it also drew on the rich reservoir of his guru's life experiences. There is the episode of Ram-lala, in which Sri Ramakrishna played with a live image—not an inert idol! Similarly, there is the astounding revelation that Sri Ramakrishna experienced and evoked: 'God talked to me. It was not merely His vision. Yes, He talked to me. Under the banyan tree I saw Him coming from the Ganges. Then, we laughed so much! By way of playing with me He cracked my fingers. Then, he talked. Yes. He talked to me.'¹⁷

Such revelations surely shaped Swamiji's affirmative attitude to areas that many modern thinkers would simply assign to what neuroscientists call 'phantoms' in the brain. Similarly, Swamiji spoke of the caste system and compared it to the spirit of the West. He said: 'Competition—cruel, cold, and heartless—is the law of Europe. Our law is caste—the breaking of competition, checking its forces, mitigating its cruelties, smoothing the passage of the human soul through this mystery of life.'¹⁸ In effect, 'attitudes towards the past that are commonplace now, can be traced directly to the glowing genius of Swami Vivekananda and his ideas are familiar, even to those who do not know his name.'¹⁹

Vivekananda's intellectual attainments and stature are well known. But many of us generally fail to notice the role that his consciousness played. Meditation was natural to him, even from an early age. It is from this reservoir of deep layers that Swamiji derived his thoughts and reflections on intricate subjects. His commentaries on the four yogas are a testimony to this. Sarah Waldo observed: 'In delivering his commentaries on the Sutras, he would leave me

waiting while he entered deep states of meditation or self-contemplation, to emerge therefrom with some luminous interpretation. I had always to keep the pen dipped in the ink. He might be absorbed for long periods of time and then suddenly his silence would be broken by some eager expression or some long deliberate teaching.'²⁰

Waldo also makes a more important observation, that Swamiji's exposition of raja yoga 'makes no foolish mysteries and demands no blind belief'. No occult business. Much more important, it does not attack the 'methods of others. It manifests a charity that is usual to call "Christian" but, which Vivekananda proves is equally the property of the Hindus.'²¹ Thus the quantum of Swamiji's *Complete Works* embodies, quite often, dimensions of consciousness that are not amenable to the enormous current studies of the various shades of the spectrum of consciousness. A fact that needs to be kept in view, since it has very far-ranging implications to the preoccupations of psychological approaches to spiritual experiences.

Ida Ansell, also known as Ujjvala, to whom we owe discoveries of several new lectures, points out that Swamiji was 'phenomenally prolific. How he could speak so often and yet always with such originality is something no one has ever been able to explain' (274). Swamiji seems to have suggested a clue: when he 'felt exhausted intellectually and incapable of appearing the next day', Swamiji 'would be aided in various ways' (ibid.). The phenomenon was described in *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*:

For instance, at dead of night he would hear a voice shouting at him the thoughts that he was to speak on the following day. Sometimes it would come as from a long distance, speaking to him down a great avenue; then it would draw nearer and nearer. Or it would be like someone delivering a lecture alongside of him, as he lay

on his bed listening. At other times two voices would argue before him discussing at great length subjects that he would find himself repeating the following day from the platform or the pulpit. Sometimes these discussions introduced ideas that he had never heard of or thought of previously.²²

What is the explanation of all this? Swamiji would 'explain that these incidents betrayed the powers and potentialities of the self' (1.459). One may feel that this is some kind of occult power, but Swamiji clarified:

That power comes to him who observes unbroken Brahmacharya for a period of twelve years, with the sole object of realising God. I have practised that kind of Brahmacharya myself, and so a screen has been removed, as it were, from my brain. For that reason, I need not any more think over or prepare myself for any lectures on such a subtle subject as philosophy. Suppose I have to lecture tomorrow; all that I shall speak about will pass tonight before my eyes like so many pictures; and the next day I put into words during my lecture all those things that I saw.²³

If this is kept in view, one can better understand what impact Swamiji had on the audience. This is the power of kundalini, which momentarily acted on some of the listeners. But Swamiji explained that 'through temporary excitement

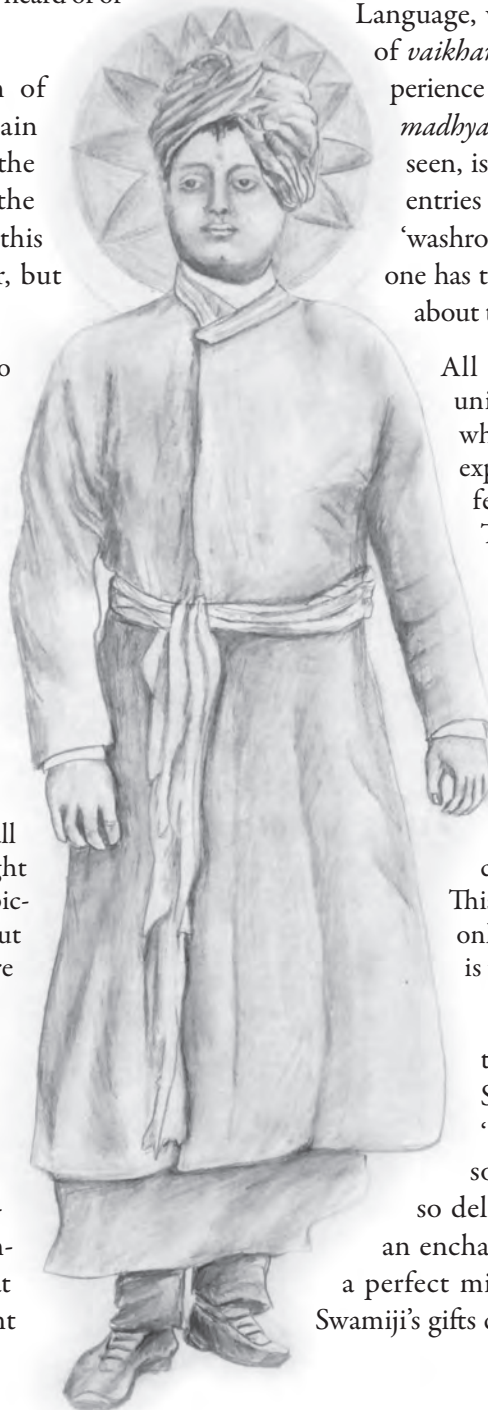
many among the audience used to get into an ecstatic state, and some would even become motionless like statues' (7.255).

Swamiji's Language and Oratory

Language, which works at the level of *vaikhari*, audible, with little experience of the other levels such as *madhyama*, middle, and *pashyanti*, seen, is bound to lead to bizarre entries to mysticism through the 'washroom' door! In this context one has to recall what Swamiji says about the Logos or *sphota*:

All this expressed sensible universe is the form, behind which stands the eternal inexpressible Sphota, the manifest as Logos or Word. This eternal Sphota, the essential eternal material of all ideas or names, is the power through which the Lord creates the universe; nay, the Lord first becomes conditioned as the Sphota, and then evolves Himself out as the yet more concrete sensible universe. This Sphota has one word as its only possible symbol, and this is the [Sanskrit] (Om) (3.57).

If this is daunting, there are other aspects of Swamiji equally awesome: 'No one had ever been so sublimely eloquent or so deliciously humorous, such an enchanting storyteller or such a perfect mimic.'²⁴ The enormity of Swamiji's gifts cannot be buckled within



the belt of any categorization. Therefore, the question of interpretation acquires a colossal formidable dimension. What could be the bases for such an undertaking? Especially, in the fact that he comes to us in the 'other tongue'—English—and not in our mother tongue(s). If it is assumed that a language that is alien does not easily admit inwardness in its use, then, how does one explain Swamiji's inwardness, which has reached the peaks of human eloquence in English? How did the 'religious instruction' of the missionaries find its way into English readers for schools? As Gouri Viswanathan points out in her fascinating work on literary study and British rule: 'In the name of teaching the mechanics of the English language, the British government saw no violation of its own instruction against religious interference by providing religious instruction indirectly.'²⁵ Much more disconcerting is that 'the safest solution was to keep Indians at the level of children, innocent and unsuspecting, of the meaning of their instruction, for once enlightened, there was no predicting how hostile they would turn toward those who were educating them' (ibid.).

English users in India have developed a myth about English. They termed it the 'lie of the land', with our 'tongue in English chains', since there is an attraction and repulsion complex towards the English and their language. It created and continues to create elitism. And the elite have an ambivalent attitude of intimacy and enmity with English. Alongside, there is a statement attributed to C Rajagopalachari that English 'is the greatest gift of Goddess Saraswati to India.'²⁶ Surely, this has its origin in the power generated by Swamiji's prayer to Goddess Saraswati before he addressed the Parliament of Religions for the first time. English is then no longer an alien tongue and has given us some of the finest Indian English poetry, fiction, and prose.

Swamiji's oratory, thus, has a significance not only in the continuity of that tradition but also in underlining the unified sensibility of sound and sense behind his words. In his linguistic speculations of the Hindus, published as early as 1933, Pratapchandra Chakravarti says that there is 'a *sruti* which not only speaks of a subtle form of speech (*Vāk*) as inherent Pure consciousness but makes it undivided with the meaning. And this undivided character of *śabda* and *artha* come to one's comprehension only in a stage of higher spiritual cultivation when all forms disappear and merge into the unity of the Infinite.'²⁷

Though Swamiji's oral mode of discourse and its electrifying impact hardly need reiteration, it is obvious that he is a practitioner and revitalizer of this ancient communicative tradition. If 'by Vedas no books are meant',²⁸ as Swamiji declared, this is also a self-revelatory insight. His *Complete Works* are not books but insights of wisdom and knowledge he accumulated not only from his vast scholarship but also from what he *saw* and *experienced* in his guru Sri Ramakrishna. This aspect is also comparable to what Harold Coward, in his comparative study of Jacques Derrida and Indian philosophy, describes as 'a shift of focus from metaphysics to philosophy of language.'²⁹ If this is an interesting phenomenon, Swamiji's significance goes beyond the usual preoccupation of linguistics in the West. We have to look at the tradition associated with the sage Bhartrihari.

Specialists on Bhartrihari's perception of *śabda brahma*, sound Brahman, say that it subsumes three aspects: a power, *śakti*, an objective, *artha*, and its accomplishments, *kriya*—the last is also indicated by the words *seva* and *sadhana*. Language as an act of speech emanates from the blending of these three. This phenomenon is operative when dualism disappears in the Infinite. Is there any evidence that this is the unique power that distinguished Swamiji's address to

the Parliament of Religions? There is.

Lillian Montgomery, who was not an inner-circle devotee, heard Swamiji's public speeches in June and July 1900 and recorded her experience:

Swami Vivekananda was so entirely different from anything that we had known in America. I had heard all my life, it seemed to me, of power and repose, and the first time I had seen it was in the presence of Swami Vivekananda. ... Power seemed to emanate from him. ...

It seemed to me there was an ocean of consciousness back of Swami Vivekananda, and in some way it focused and flowed through his words. ...

There was a purity, and an intense power as such, a power I think we have never seen—that I had never seen, and I don't expect I will ever see it again. It seemed to pour from an infinite source, and it was perfectly calm, perfectly reposed.³⁰

Harold Coward, discussing Derrida's quest for an enlarged view of writing, quotes a Socratic dialogue, wherein the wisest sage of that time talks about the sort of dialogue that was emerging through his words: 'The sort that goes together with knowledge, and is written in the soul of the learner, that can defend itself, and knows to whom it should speak, and to whom it should say nothing.'³¹ Swamiji's words, speech, and thoughts come close to this and are capable of being put to multiple contexts and uses. No wonder that one such use is in the teaching of English, its pedagogic models. Though there is no reference to Swamiji, in an English teaching-oriented journal published by the United States Department of State for Teachers of English the very first essay is 'Harmonious Learning: Yoga in the Yoga Language Classroom' by Lisa Morgan.³² While Swamiji spoke on harmony of faiths, Lisa Morgan formulated a harmonious *learning* process; whether it is hatha yoga, which is Lisa's site, or raja yoga, yoga is yoga,

and its foundational architect in the West is Swami Vivekananda.

Science and Religion

Before looking at Swamiji's agenda we should look at his profound grounding in the nascent disciplines coming up in the US, in particular, and the West in general. There is the incident in which Swamiji was asked by a gentleman 'what books he would advise him to read on chemistry, whereupon the Hindu monk responded with a long list of English works on this science, which one would naturally expect an American to know more about than a Hindu. Another gentleman followed with a request as to what books he recommended on astronomy, to which Kananda [Swamiji] obligingly answered with another equally good list of English astronomical works.'³³ Obviously, Swamiji was equally proficient in areas of emerging industrialization and other aspects of modernity. This can be seen, in Indic terms, as uncommon awareness of not only Shruti but also Smriti texts. In fact, the most astonishing thing about him was the range of subjects he was familiar with. More importantly, he made original ways of looking at them available. Balancing the usable tradition with the present, he turned his holistic agendas remarkably contemporary.

Swamiji pointed out: 'As the Western ideas of organisation and external civilisation are penetrating and pouring into our country, whether we will have them or not, so Indian spirituality and philosophy are deluging the lands of the West. None can resist it, and no more can we resist some sort of material civilisation from the West.'³⁴ Also, along with philosophy, science has gained almost an impregnable status. Swamiji's views on science are based, again, on unity. In his 'Parliament of Religions' address, he said: 'Science is nothing but the finding of unity. As soon as science would reach perfect unity, it would

stop from further progress because it would reach the goal' (1.14). And 'through multiplicity and duality, the ultimate unity is reached Religion can go no further. This is the goal of all science. ... All science is bound to come to this conclusion in the long run' (1.15).

The ethos of science exhibits uneasiness about its certainties and rigid commitments to its methods of knowledge. We also wonder at the dramatic juxtaposition of the atomic scientist J Robert Oppenheimer reciting the Bhagavadgita *shloka*: 'A thousand suns, appearing in the sky,' even as the atomic explosion took place.³⁵ Another interesting observation comes from the incomparable Ludwig Wittgenstein, pointing out that: "The use of the word "science" for everything that can be meaningfully said constitutes an "overrating of science."³⁶ Of course, the obvious meaning of this idea has been interpreted in so many ways that one either accepts all our knowledge as a Babel of 'language games' or presses it to illustrate one's argument. Language games could be Acharya Shankara's *shabdajalam maharanyam*, network of words like a great forest.³⁷

Connecting all the threads of knowledge, Swamiji insisted: there is unity. 'Knowledge is to find unity in the midst of diversity—to establish unity among things which appear to us to be different from one another. That particular relation by which man finds this sameness is called Law. That is what is known as Natural Law.'³⁸

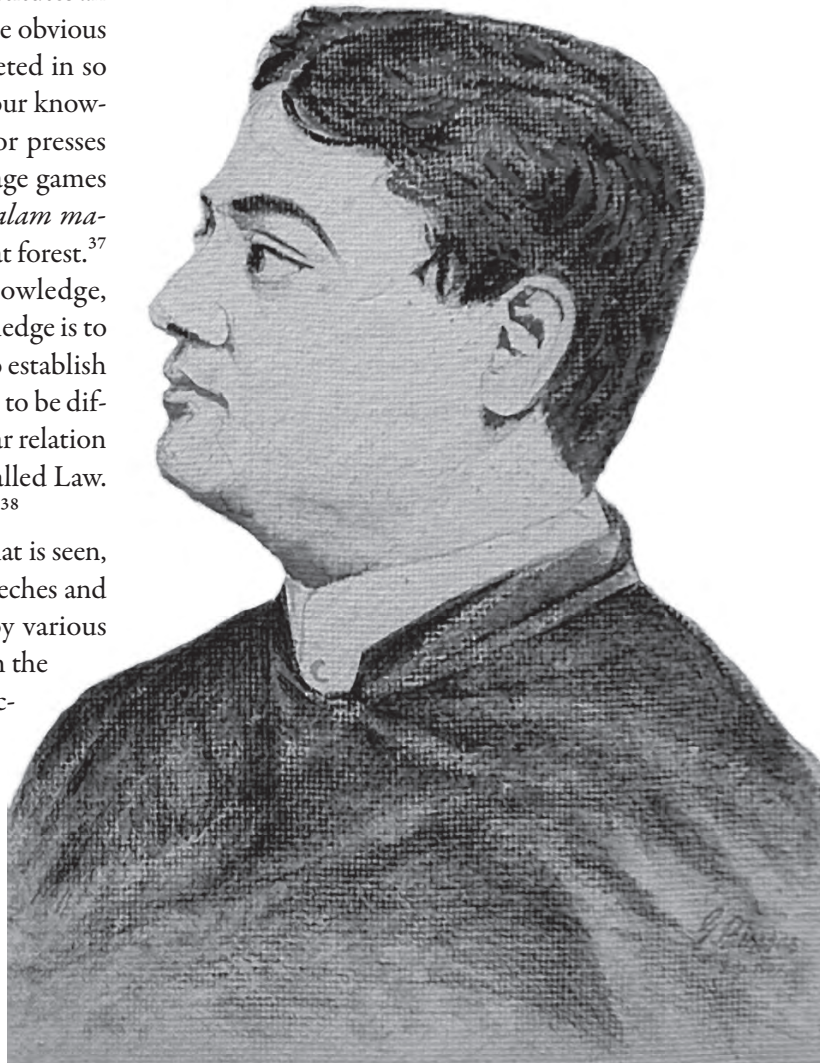
It is this unity as the Natural Law that is seen, either obviously or obliquely in his speeches and writings. 'Truth is one, sages call it by various names', is the assertion running through the traditions of Indian thought and practice. Explaining Derrida's 'religion without religion', John Caputo points out a truth that remains one, even, if it is quite often 'a forgotten truth'. 'One is always working inside a tradition or

the institutions founded upon them: it is not possible to work elsewhere, to collect a check without a bursar or controller.'³⁹ This is true, but when we act or think on this assumption, one has to separate the grain of tradition from the chaff and accretions of dubious contributions that go under tradition. It is the core of usable tradition that constitutes Vivekananda's Vedanta Shruti.

(To be concluded)

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(Continued from page 277)

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Life and Death

Prof. Kaulir Kisor Chatterjee

(Continued from the previous issue)

PARALLEL TO THIS reproduction breakthrough in nature, another 'living' thing called the virus arose. A virus is an exceptional creation. It is a chemical compound or crystal. As soon as it enters a living body, it starts feeding on the cells of that host body. This signifies that every living creature needs an external environment to survive and reproduce. Viruses need the environment inside a living body to reproduce, while a bacterium, depending on its species, lives in a host body as well as on the atmosphere. A bacterium is one millionth of a metre in size and a virus is so small that up to fifty viruses can live inside the cell of a bacterium. Until the first batch of bacteria came into being, viruses had been in existence as crystals, and as soon as they could enter into the bacteria, they became living creatures multiplying much faster than bacteria.

From Non-living to Living

This first batch of viruses marked the transition from elements to compounds and then to living creatures. Bacteria represented a somewhat advanced stage—not the DNA/gene stage—in the process of chemical combinations among primordial elements. The process of transition, from an element to a complex compound of multiple elements, was a continuous one.

Viruses and bacteria needed a continuous supply of energy as well as raw materials from their respective milieu. As the milieu was evolving according to physical laws, so did the viruses and bacteria. They multiplied to newer groups feeding on combinations of energy and elements

available in the newer milieus. Therefore, the natural process of chemistry, for the formation of de-oxy-ribose and ultimately DNA/chromosome, did not remain blocked out. About 1.9 billion years ago, after the supposed coming of viruses and bacteria, a new type of living cell containing a chromosome with genetic codes and genes—500 numbers—was formed. In order to prevent the chromosomes, RNA, and protein molecules from falling apart, the DNA made a thin membrane of protein to cover the cell. The membrane was a defence against uninhibited entry of viruses into the cell. This first batch of covered cells—eukaryote—with a chromosome marked the beginning of all higher forms of life including animals and humans.

Some physicists like Stephen Hawking think that during such repetitive replications of the same processes thousands and millions of times, some 'error' may very well have taken place. These errors resulted in a slight alteration of the genetic codes and the start of a new lineage of a species, with different types of proteins and characteristics. Bioscientists attribute these changes to the urge to survive, individually, as well as to prevent extinction of the species. Reproduction arises from this urge. It drives organisms to adapt to changing conditions such as food supply, external threat, and so on. It may be surmised that this innate urge is the fundamental principle of the universe to move from instability towards stability. The individual members of each species also tend towards stability within its milieu, which is evolving all the time. The factor of

food supply also explains why an evolutionary branch gives off sub-branches. In competing for a finite quantity of food, the winners have the advantage, while the losers are forced to adapt to another kind of food, to which their genes respond. This interaction yields a new kind of protein capable of new functions, which ultimately makes them winners. This change in a life form has been termed as mutation by evolutionary biologists. Mutation involves change in the chromosome and gene count.

The food available in the milieu for primitive bacterial species was sulphur, sourced to the hydrogen sulphide gas in the atmosphere. By about 2.5 billion years ago the demands of the increasing bacterial population began to outstrip the supply of sulphur. Then a fraction, losing out in the competition, began adapting to iron that was available as ferrous oxide dissolved in the ocean water. Thus a new species of living being started proliferating.

Eventually, the easy supply of iron also began running short, and in response to this change a new species of bacteria called cyanobacteria—called blue-green algae—mutated from the older ones. They apparently depended neither on sulphur nor on iron for survival. These bacteria developed some ability to separate, with the help of sunlight, the carbon from carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and assimilate it. This was the first small step towards what we call photosynthesis, which is the mainstay for survival of the entire plant kingdom today. A side effect of immense significance was that the oxygen released from the carbon dioxide began to increase in the atmosphere.

During 600 million years, from 2.5 to 1.9 billion years ago, most of the dissolved ferrous oxide converted to a more stable ferric oxide—hematite—substantially reducing the rate of oxygen depletion from the atmosphere. Consequently,

the percentage of oxygen in the atmosphere rose significantly. Then appeared the species called red algae or algae, the earliest member of the eukaryote. It not only contained chromosomes with genetic codes and genes but also the ability of photosynthesis with improved efficiency. During daytime the algae assimilated the carbon from the atmospheric carbon dioxide with the help of sunlight and during night lived on parts of the released oxygen. The effect of ferrous oxide depletion and increase of algae population during the next 300 million years—1.6 billion years ago—was the steady rise of oxygen levels in the atmosphere. The lineage of the cyanobacteria-algae eventually continued to give rise to the vast plant kingdom, characterized by the ability to photosynthesize.

The next big leap took part more than 1,150 million years ago. During this period, lasting 750–570 million years, a new lineage branched out and the first multicellular organism appeared. This primitive marine organism, whose porous body is supported by a fibrous skeletal framework, has been named ‘sponge’—for instance the jellyfish. The primitive sponge is regarded as the oldest evidence of higher life and as the last common ancestor of all animals and humans.

The first animals with backbones were the fish, which were living 450 million years ago, and at about the same time the first land plants started proliferating. The first batch of land animals was a species of small crawling insects called millipedes that colonized the land 390 million years ago. 60 million years later flying insects and amphibians appeared. They were followed by the first full-fledged land dwellers called reptiles—for instance the dinosaurs. The mammals and birds, which were living alongside the dinosaurs, outlived them and began diversifying profusely since 65 million years ago. An asteroid or comet that hit the Earth created a global disaster,

wiping not just dinosaurs but also many plant, reptile, and animal species. This gave a niche to the smaller mammals that survived the disaster. Through the macaques, orang-utans, and chimpanzees the mammals eventually evolved to some kind of giant apes about 4.5 million years ago—gorillas are the nearest living creatures related to that species.

These giant apes mutated to begin a new lineage—the hominid lineage—about 4 million years ago. The hominid is a primate family that includes humans. One of the first species of this lineage was *Australopithecus afarensis*. During 2.5–2.0 million years ago a species named *Homo habilis* with distinct human features, including relatively larger-sized brain, appeared. The word *habilis* signifies ‘ability’, and it was named so because *Homo habilis* had the ability to somehow stand, grasp rocks, pieces of wood, and bones to defend itself. *Homo erectus*—came half a million years later, that is, during 2.0–1.5 million years ago. Its legs were stronger and feet flatter, and its toes and fingers underwent changes. This resulted in the ability to stand erect and walk, make crude tools for hunting and defending. The initial brain size of the *Homo erectus* was three fourth of the modern humans. They explored new habitats and spread over large parts of the world. About 120,000–160,000 years ago two lineages branched out from *Homo erectus*. One of them consisted in the *Homo neanderthalensis* or simply Neanderthals, and the other was *Homo sapiens*, intelligent man, or modern humans. At the beginning all the three species—*Homo erectus*, Neanderthals, and *Homo sapiens*—coexisted, but the first two lost the race to *Homo sapiens*. The genes of the *Homo sapiens* could manufacture a variety of proteins responsible for a variety of simple and complex functions. These proteins kept diversifying, giving the *Homo sapiens* the capacity to talk, think, draw, paint, and so on. It

is believed that although the Neanderthals were physiologically much like the modern humans, they lacked creativity. Perhaps, in this, the modern humans overtook them as creativity helped them survive. The number of chromosomes in a cell and that of the genes in a chromosome together determine a species—each cell of the *Homo sapiens* species consists of 46 chromosomes. And the number of genes with genetic codes—that is, the possible manner of grouping of up to 200,000 pairs of nucleotides—defines an individual member of a species.

Meaning of Death

The primary energies for life come from the surrounding universe. Physicists have recognized only a few of them, and the rest has been grouped as dark energy. As regards the secondary energies, the part remaining within the body in the form of dreams, thoughts, emotions, instincts, and so on is what we call mind. The other part of the secondary energies, expressed in the form of eating, reproduction, movement, speech, capacity to produce art, and so forth constitutes activity.

Psychologists speak about three levels of mind: unconscious, subconscious, and conscious. The latter is further divided into intelligence and intuition. The ancient philosophers and sages of India added another level called super-conscious. Scientists have attributed these levels of the mind, except the super-conscious, to the activity of the neurons and the neural network. The number of neurons in a human brain and nervous system is about 86 billion. In a sponge the number of neurons is zero; round worm, 302; an ant, 250,000; a mouse, 75 million; a chimpanzee, 6.7 billion; an elephant, 23 billion. It has also been estimated and generally accepted that the total number of synapses in the human brain are about 100 trillion.

Let us examine life in the context of the postulate of upstream primary and downstream secondary energies. A gene creates a cell, which replicates itself due to the interaction between the primary energy and the ingredients entering through air and food. To make the proteins function continuously, a continuous supply of ingredients along with the primary energy is necessary. For reasons such as infection, by viruses and bacteria, and inadequacy of the ingredients a protein molecule may not form to its full functional potentiality. It is also possible that the primary energy is not able to reach the target cell due to problems in the transmission network. Because of this neurons and synapses with different functional efficiencies may be formed—some may be relatively more efficient, some less.

Nevertheless, inactivity in a normal human being may not be permanent. If the protein forms but does not function due to inadequacy of the energy, then a stronger dose of energy may raise the activity level of a neuron. The strength of the energy may be increased by reinforcement with secondary energy, either from outside or from inside the body through the process of concentrating the diffused thoughts of the mind. Among the huge number of neurons, synapses, and molecular switches it is always likely that not all of them will be fully active in a normal human being. The level of consciousness may increase as the number of active neurons or synapses increases, and a human being may thus be conscious, subconscious, or unconscious. While instinct and memory is a faculty of the subconscious mind, intellect and intuition result from higher numbers of active neurons and synapses.

Death has remained a mystery. However, let us first see what happens to the 'life' of the metals and other elements. We have already seen that hydrogen was the first recognizable atom to which all elements owe their origin. As the

plasma changed to a gaseous state and finally to solid, radioactive metals kept losing their particles through radioactivity. This loss of their atomic number or weight changed their identities. Ultimately, they ended up as some non-radioactive element like lead, helium, and so on. Here we see that such metals are tending to attain stability all the time. Nevertheless, is lead completely stable? No, because with a change in the chemical milieu, lead may change to its compounds and may lose its identity again. In this way, the original radioactive metal may keep transforming until the surrounding conditions of heat and chemistry attain complete stability, which might never happen.

If we examine a non-radioactive element like silicon, which itself was the product of collision among other atoms in a plasmatic state, we see that it has combined with oxygen under a different set of conditions to become sand. In this process both silicon and oxygen lost their identities. But even sand is not stable; under a new set of conditions it may change to microscopic clay minerals such as kaolinite, montmorillonite, and attapulgite. Each is a compound of different metals and other elements with different identities, which again join together to form clay under yet another set of conditions.

The point is that when the whole universe is unstable and is continuously seeking stability, everything within it is also doing the same. The stars are always transforming till they become faintly glowing white dwarfs or black holes, which, as the physicists say, are not completely dead but keep pulsating, rotating, and absorbing energies. The plasma itself is characterized by extremely chaotic movement of electrically charged particles at great speeds. In the case of the metals and other elements, death only means losing identity and assuming another. This postulate holds good for all lower forms of beings.

Some regard that viruses never die and only 'sleep' when deprived of the right food in host bodies. The unicellular bacteria are also looked upon as 'deathless' in the sense that the life of a 'mother' bacterium does not end, it only divides itself into two and two becoming four and so on. Let us analyse this further. A virus is a crystal made up of two or more atoms. It is able to retain its identity passing between inactivity and activity, depending on the availability of food in a particular biochemical environment. However, if either the biology or the chemistry changes, the virus also changes to another species. Although it still remains a virus, its species and original identity undergo change. If the conditions become such as to dissociate even the individual crystals, it may transform back into the elementary atoms. In the case of bacteria also, the mother bacteria keeps losing its identity. Does death, in the case of higher forms of living beings, also mean loss of identity during the process of search for stability?

Individuals belonging to a higher species are defined by the genetic code and the kind of proteins made by the chromosome, genetic codes, and RNA, with the help of the raw materials absorbed. The life energy remains all the time responsible for the genes to act. The stages in life such as childhood, youth, and old age are the result of progressive diversification and an increase or decrease of the number of proteins manufactured by the system in response to the needs of the beings. Such transformation from one stage to another, already encrypted within the genes in the form of innumerable genetic codes, goes on seamlessly. However, death cannot be regarded as one more stage. The reason is that death may happen at any stage and it marks a stoppage of production of proteins, not diversification. Therefore, death of living beings, in the case of eukaryotes and higher forms, seems

to be different from mere loss of identity to another living identity. It is the loss of the ability, gradual or sudden, to make proteins. As regards sudden stoppage there are three possibilities: (i) If the genetic code is destroyed, the gene will be unable to pass its instruction to the RNA for making proteins, even if raw materials are available; (ii) if the supply of raw materials is withdrawn or reduced, then no new chromosome or no new protein will be made; (iii) if life energy is blocked from reaching and activating the genes, the whole system will cease to function. Such aberrations may happen due to diseases or accidents and damage to the protective covers of the cells of the eukaryotes, due to which the chromosomes/DNA along with the genes and the RNA fall apart.

Even if no such thing happens, the chromosomes, one by one, will still stop producing proteins, because in the genetic codes themselves are encrypted the number of times a chromosome will execute the same set of instructions. After the pre-programmed number of executions, a cell stops replicating itself, but the already produced cells remain. These cells continue to receive primary energy and in the process convert the proteins to secondary energy. This is because matter cannot be destroyed, it only transforms into energy. This energy-matter-energy dynamics continues until the proteins stop getting instructions to function and become dysfunctional. This is, in essence, the process of aging followed by natural death. In the case of zero aberration, albeit very rare if not impossible, the transition to old age and then death is seamless. We often tend to call these events destiny or fate, because they are not within our control. According to recent research, however, our genes and genetic variations can be turned off and on by behavioural choices.

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Eternal Words

Swami Adbhutananda

Compiled by Swami Siddhananda; translated by Swami Sarvadevananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

THERE IS NO OTHER way out except through holy company. One is entangled day and night in worldly troubles, carrying only bad intentions, trickery, and fraud in one's mind. How will devotion and faith in God develop with such a mind? Doubts are sure to come. It is the nature of the mind to lack faith in the words of the holy and the scriptures. Associate with the sadhus. Try to obey their instructions. Gradually the mind will become pure and free from doubt. One needs to strive. Does anything happen without effort? You will not strive. Instead, you want to achieve spirituality by fraud. How can that be my dear? One gains faith in spirituality by long association with the sadhus. Without faith in spirituality it is difficult to attain spiritual knowledge.

So long as you live you should associate with sadhus. Whoever wants to be perfect should associate with them. Who is a sadhu? How will one recognize him? A sadhu is one whose mind is egoless, who is immersed in the contemplation of God alone, who is peaceful, who has no sense of competition, hatred, or jealousy, and who regards all with the eye of equality. The one who has realized God is the greatest of sadhus.

Do you know why a person wears a religious garb? It installs the idea of purity in the mind. Renunciation will manifest in the minds of those who use such garbs, provided they are pure and have a spirit of renunciation. If one wants to do something wrong, most of the time such a garb will save that person by causing the question to arise: 'Having renounced everything, why will I

do such a thing?' Such a garb will keep an honest and pure soul alert, ever holding on to the spirit of renunciation. Such a person will be incapable of unrighteousness in thought or action. Should any such improper thought arise in one's mind, one will instantly remember: 'I am a sadhu!' But you know there is in reality no relationship between the mind and the garb. Honesty and dishonesty exist only in the mind. One who although using no outer garb is a true sadhu within, will not harm anyone. But for one who is not a sadhu within, such outer garb is utterly useless. That person is a thief who, while wearing a sadhu's garb externally, keeps his mind in impure thoughts. It will never bring one any good.

Show your guileless attitude towards a sadhu and towards your guru—don't be a hypocrite. If one is a hypocrite, it results in tremendous inauspiciousness. They love and bless those who are guileless.

Such is the impact of holy company that it liberates a person. There is no mistake in this. Holy company is very much needed. If one can have holy company even for one moment, it can give one the means to cross the ocean of worldly existence. Now understand the matter! Even in the midst of this tumultuous world, one should find time to associate with the holy; that will surely bring good. Like worms crawling in worldliness, you are so mesmerized by maya that while you get time for every other work, you cannot find time for such holy work. People spend time enjoying the theatre, finding ample time

for that. But they never get time to have a little holy company or enjoy discussing some spiritual topic. As is your understanding, so will be your intentions and actions; so also will be your reward. Afterwards, you will have to suffer.

It cannot be understood what religion is if one does not associate with the holy. Reading a thousand books will do nothing. Bhagavan says: 'Even if one does not study the Vedas, nor performs fasting nor austerities, still one can realize God by keeping holy company alone.' The prescription of this holy association has been given in all the scriptures.

Will a sadhu cleanse the dirt of your mind every day? Is he your trash collector? Let him do it once; then you try to keep it clean. If you make no such effort, how can the sadhu do anything?

The Vaishnavas have extremely divisive thinking! They worship the *tulasi*, basil, plant and salute it, but do not worship the *bel* tree. My dear, is your God only in the *tulasi* plant and not in the *bel* tree? Trying to make your God great, you are belittling him on account of your dull intellect, such has become the condition of God. I do not acknowledge a God who is only in the *tulasi* plant and not in the *bel* tree. My God is everywhere—as in the *tulasi* tree, so also in the *bel* plant. Due to lack of holy association such mean understanding arises. There is no broadness.

Science of Religion

Worldly people cannot understand the Gita because without renunciation the essence of the Gita cannot be understood. The Master used to say that by repeating the words 'Gita', 'Gita' ten times one receives the same result as one gets from reading the Gita. The real import of the Gita cannot be rightly understood if one has no sadhana. Moreover, how can the spirit of renunciation be properly established in one's heart if one does not practise disciplines? What does

the Gita say? *Tyaga, tyaga*; renunciation, renunciation—within and without. If one does not observe celibacy or engage in sadhana, this idea does not solidify. 'Gita, Gita; *tyagi, tyagi*.' Think on this. Then only the meaning of the Gita will be revealed to you.

Hold onto that from which every supply comes. Gaslight is all over the city, but the supply comes from one place. Hold onto that place from which all power is emanating, and you will get everything.

In 'my seeing', maya is 'created'. People are mesmerized by this maya. 'My' maya is so sweet. A person cannot understand how very sweet this 'I' is. 'Oh Arjuna, do not forget me; if you do not forget me, maya will not be able to do anything to you.' See the characteristics of maya! She created such a huge lake with so many varieties of birds and insects! Observing this, it all appears to be true, but it is nothing. There is no escape from the hands of maya. Yet, God saves one who takes refuge in him. That person alone on whom God bestows his grace can escape the hands of maya.

The gross body of liberated souls will decompose; yet, even if the body goes, their power remains; it does not go. This power continues to do good to people even after the body is no more.

My dear, can there be any fault in water? Water becomes contaminated only because of some impure admixture. Once water becomes polluted with a contaminant, it is difficult to refine it. But once it is refined, it becomes the same pure water. So too, a person becomes spoiled by bad association. Once one is bad, it will be difficult to make the person good again. One becomes a good person again as soon as those negative associations leave him. A person is inherently good; one only becomes bad by evil association.

So long as there is divisive understanding, so long will people create sects. If the divisive

attitude departs, the *upadhi*, false identification, is destroyed. At the destruction of the *upadhi*, one becomes aware of one's Divine consciousness. Then the world is revealed to be full of Consciousness. All names, forms, doctrines, and paths are realized as true. Only the one supreme Brahman has become all this. When that realization comes, the divisiveness of doctrines and paths, and the attitudes of love and hatred go away. When the full knowledge dawns that the world is unreal and Brahman alone is true, a divisive attitude will not remain. Then one will see everything to be true and pervaded by Brahman.

None can recognize God in the place where he takes a human birth. The people of other places come to know that he is God. The Master used to say: 'Darkness remains just below the lamp—its light shines at a distance.' Exactly so, in that home where God takes birth, those with whom he is living all the time cannot comprehend that he is God. He is God in human form living among them. One, and only that one to whom God reveals himself, can know him. Others become doubtful. They cannot believe that God has taken a human form, or that he verily is that. See God's *maya*!

When one becomes pure, one will have the understanding that: 'I am verily Vishnu. I am a child of Vishnu. My life is pure. I play. It is my power that plays.' God wants purity. Those like Hanuman and Shukadeva were extremely pure. They knew what God is. That is why they renounced all the enjoyment of happiness the world can give. By knowing God they achieved such joy and peace that they could in no way forget it. The joy of the world became insignificant.

God is very near. But an embodied being under the spell of *maya* thinks that he is far away. By God's grace, as soon as the ignorance of a person is removed, one can see that God is very near; God is one's innermost self.

When one realizes God, one remains ever in bliss. One ceases to be restless in happiness or misery. Jealousy, hatred, and the rest do not remain at all. How can they influence one? One need not tell a realized person to love God. That person's devotion arises spontaneously.

God is beyond duality, beyond the three *gunas*. So long as one remains in the realm of duality God cannot be realized. If one wants to realize God, one has to keep the mind unruffled by the dual opposites of pleasure and pain. Otherwise God cannot be seen. While God is beyond the three *gunas*, he is adorned with limitless qualities. When one's mind becomes pure by spiritual disciplines, one can know God and his endless glories.

Great souls, sadhus, and holy people—they are to be remembered first upon waking up each morning. By remembering them one becomes honest and pure. Whomsoever of them one recollects, one will attain those qualities. If one remembers wicked people, evil tendencies will arise. If one remembers honest people, one will be guided by honesty. This is the rule.

Of what importance is it that one has not taken the monastic vows? One's karma is the primary thing. One who lives and acts like a monk is verily a monk. One who has the mind of a monk is verily the right type of monk. Is it enough if one merely puts on some external garb? The ochre robe is a sign of renunciation. He is a true monk who has been dyed in the colour of ochre. There is no harm for if one does not wear such outer garb, but has, from the bottom of one's heart, truly renounced everything.

The garb reminds us of renunciation. One should think: 'I am a monk. Will I do such bad things?' Such an attitude does not allow one to engage in any impropriety, cunning, or cheating. This much is the benefit of the garb. But for one in whose mind there is no renunciation or monk-like

qualities, nothing can be achieved by putting on the outer garb. That person cannot be sincere.

A doubt arose in the Master's mind: if Sri Chaitanya is an avatara, his name would have been spread all over the globe; but his name is known only in Bengal and Orissa! Later, in a divine vision, the Master saw Sri Chaitanya coming from that 'abode' from whence all avatars come. Thereafter his doubt disappeared; he was certain that Sri Chaitanya was an avatara.

Vidura did not eat without offering to God even the food that he collected by begging. One who eats without offering God's items to God is a thief. Moreover, such unoffered food is impure. Whatever you eat, eat it after offering it to God. If it is offered to God, the defects of food are destroyed and the food becomes pure.

Sri Chaitanya entered into the temple at Puri for God's darshan and did not come out, he became merged there. That is why the Master did not go there, lest his body might not remain. He used to say: 'Do you know why I did not go to Gaya and Puri? If I go, I will not be able to come back—the body will fall.'

The Master used to say: 'I used to think: Rasmani is the daughter of a fisherman's family. From where did she get such a splendid understanding? Then I saw in my divine vision that Rasmani is the maidservant of Mother Durga. That is why I say, where will she get such an understanding without that?'

If one has a vision of God, one becomes free from all doubts and ego, and has great devotion and love for God. God's love is infinite. His knowledge is endless. That is why, on realizing God, one certainly becomes 'That'.

The power of an embodied being and the divine power of an avatara are entirely different. The power of an embodied being is limited; it cannot even bring good to itself. The power of an avatara is divine power; it can bring good to

the entire world.

How will that god who is pleased by getting a piece of meat or overwhelmed by a little wine confer liberation? Swamiji used to say: 'I do not acknowledge such a god. I do not call one God who becomes elated by getting wine and meat and becomes angry otherwise.'

Prakashananda was a very famous *dandi*, staff carrying, swami. He was almost like the king of Kashi. Sri Chaitanya went there. Prakashananda said: 'What is this nonsense of singing God's name? It is said in the Vedas that one should remain calm like the sea. It is your mental confusion that causes you to sing and dance.' Sri Chaitanya was returning after taking a bath at the Manikarnika [Ghat]. He met Prakashananda on the road. Sri Chaitanya revealed to him the truth: 'That light you meditate upon; I am that very light.' There was nowhere to go—Prakashananda fell at his feet. That's all. Sri Chaitanya had come to Kashi just to draw Prakashananda to him. God will have to redeem those who are genuine sadhus. The Gita mentions this.

The power is sure to come to one who calls upon God. God is the substratum of all power. He knows what work can be done and by whom. He supplies the power for one to do such work. People are overwhelmed by maya. They think that everything is happening by their own power. This is not so my dear. Being established in the heart, God is supplying us the power to work. Everything in the world and universe you see is moving by the power of God's will. Overwhelmed by maya, no one can understand that God is verily behind it all, supplying the infinite power that causes everything to work. Only one whom God shows by direct knowledge and whom he causes to understand can catch this infinite play of his. Others are overwhelmed and unconscious in the spell of his infinite maya. How can they understand God's play?

As a result of their past karma, some become gurus and some disciples. The fruits of people's actions forcefully brings these results. It is not within anyone's strength to stop this power. Karma alone puts one person beneath another and sets another person free. That is why the Gita says: 'Inscrutable is the way of karma.' It is hard to understand. But he, the Lord of the whole universe, can, if he wishes, also reverse this. As God is the Master, all actions must follow his wishes. Is this statement false? My dear, I am speaking the truth.

It is better not to eat fish, meat, and similar other food of the rajasic quality while practising sadhana. Such food makes the senses strong. The spiritual aspirant should also renounce envy. But for a person of knowledge whose spiritual attitude is non-dual, whose envy has dissipated, and whose senses are controlled, there are no rules regarding food and conduct. If such a one eats fish or meat, it does one no harm, nor does it bring him any undesired result. Milk, ghee, and roots are all sattvic food. If one eats these, one's sattvic quality increases. These types of food are good for the spiritual sadhaka.

What is the need of doing so much austerity? Our guru did not command such things. Eat well, dress well. Eat whatever you can digest, and call upon God. He whom you are calling upon is all powerful. He knows everything. You have renounced all of these things and voluntarily accepted all these sufferings for his sake. Does he not understand all this? God knows everything. He sees your heart; he doesn't look at your exterior. He is the master-controller dwelling within.

You are making a sane person mad by calling out: 'Mad! Mad!' You have a very bad intention! Swamiji used to say: 'If a person is told that he is useless and insignificant, he will be brought low. If someone tells him that he is incapable and powerless, then he will become powerless.'


Understand this! Swamiji also used to say: 'For one who is weak, tell him, "You are powerful! You are powerful!" He will be powerful in no time.' In the same way, tell anyone who is dishonest: 'You are honest! You are honest!' You will see that he has become honest. All of this is true. Did Swamiji utter any untruth? Swamiji would not accept any idea unless he understood it as the truth. Such was his nature.

If everyone were free, who would remain in bondage? Freedom and bondage will remain forever in this world. If everyone were to be liberated, it would bring about the total dissolution of the world; the same would be true if everyone were to become bound. It is said in the Gita: 'This world is made of duality. In the state of balance, everything becomes dissolved—there is no creation—only stillness.'

(To be continued)

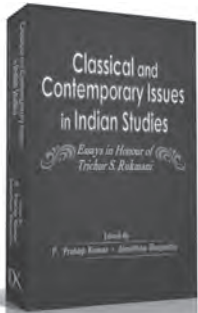
(Continued from page 303)

At death the cells of an individual stop replicating and making proteins, which were responsible for the secondary energies within cells in the form of emotions, memories, thoughts, and so on, and also that which has emitted out of the cells as activities. After the proteins stop carrying out any new function the mind also dies, and the energy in the form of extant emotions and thoughts go out without any perceptible manifestation.

As regards the body, in whatever way it is disposed of, it eventually becomes transformed to ash or clay particles that finally disintegrate to the primary elements—hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, and phosphorus. It may be possible that those primary elements, in course of innumerable permutations and combinations, may start the process of formation of life all over again and may end up in some form of life. Thus the cycle of physical life and death starts once again. 

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Classical and Contemporary Issues in Indian Studies: Essays in Honour of Trichur S Rukmani

Eds P Pratap Kumar and
Jonathan Duquette

D K Printworld, 'Vedashri' F-395, Sudarshan Park, New Delhi 110 015.
Website: www.dkprintworld.com. 2013.
xviii + 461 pp. ₹ 1500.

In one of Rukmani's earlier works, *Samnyasin in the Hindu Tradition: Changing Perspectives*, we find the acme of her efforts to understand the religion of her birth, which has been so castigated recently by Wendy Doniger. While Doniger takes a destructive structuralist perspective and remains merely fragmented in her analysis of Sanatana Dharma, Rukmani approaches Hindu institutions and culture with *shraddha*, faith, being a *yogini* herself. Therefore, it is fitting that a scholar of her stature will be honoured with a Festschrift volume, wherein Indologists have come together to write on various aspects of yoga, Rukmani's own academic forte.

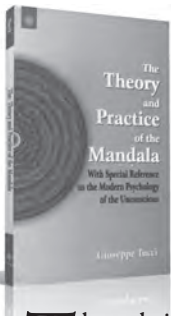
Part one of the book is devoted to the construction of a hermeneutics of comprehending Patanjali. Gerald James Larson, in the concluding essay of this part, assesses 'Yoga's Theism: A New Way of Understanding God'. Larson sees the Nirguna Atman within the framework of Saguna Ishvara, these again are seen through the lens of the *Yoga Sutra*. Part two is more familiar to the monist, in which the Vedantist's standpoint is interrogated, the starting point being Acharya Shankara's corpora. Part three has a unique essay that tackles headlong the issue of human freedom and agency: 'Freedom in the Bhagavad-Gita: An Analysis of Buddhi and Sattva Categories' by the editor P Pratap Kumar. Hinduism is mistakenly thought to be determinist and just another construction of the dialectic of history. Larson, and

now Kumar in this anthology, strongly posit the presence of a God equivalent to the Yahweh of the Christians, who participates in the human warp and woof of history and also allows human agency within temporality. For instance, Sri Ramakrishna has a similar role as Christ in the Judaic tradition: they show the point when eternity, or essence, or being, negates nothingness and non-being by interrupting chronicity.

The works of Dr Rukmani, Larson, and Kumar may be extrapolated to defend Hinduism against scripturally vacuous attacks of scholars whose understanding of the world is merely pragmatic, nihilistic, or plainly atheistic. These scholars have their roots in such false philosophies as that of Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre saw nothingness as the essence of the being within time: Martin Heidegger's *sund und zeit* had little value for Sartre, or later for Jacques Derrida—it seems that these two still rule philosophy departments throughout the world. This Festschrift volume under review corrects both misconceptions about Hinduism and works against various soul-negating philosophies—the latter is effected through a nuanced reading of not only Vedanta but later of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana as well. The essay on technology and archaeology of violence and ahimsa by Carl Olson is remarkable for its insights into the triad of simulation, Gandhi's concept of peace, and the very real threat of human atavism. Olson brings a close reading of contemporary Western thinkers to the politics of passive resistance in a world now regulated through the 'new media'. Rukmani's abiding interest in renunciation is honoured by Leslie C Orr in part five of this six-part volume. The biographical profile of Trichur S Rukmani at the beginning of the book seems to this reviewer the most interesting.

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The Theory and Practice of the Mandala

Giuseppe Tucci,
trans. Alan Houghton Brodrick

New Age Books, A-44 Naraina Industrial Area, Phase-I, New Delhi 110 028. 2013. Website: www.newagebooksindia.com. ix + 146 pp. ₹ 250.

The subtitle of this book is 'With Special Reference to the Modern Psychology of the Unconscious', and in fact the author aims at gaining spiritual experience and gnosis through meditation on and identification with the symbols etched on a 'site'. The mandala is a kind of mystical diagram used to invoke divinity, both in Buddhism and Hinduism. The mandala of Buddhist conception may roughly be considered the Buddhist version of the Hindu Sri Chakra or Sri Vidya. The Buddhist mandala and the Sri Chakra are liturgical devices to outgrow creature consciousness and awaken into super-consciousness.

This book has five chapters, apart from an appendix and index. In the first chapter the *raison d'être* of a mandala is analysed. A mandala is an efficacious means of overcoming the existential crisis of humankind, which is the incarceration in samsara, and to attain nirvana.

The second chapter 'Mandala as a Means of Reintegration' studies the practical efficiency of mandala in effecting a paradigm shift in human consciousness. It investigates the role of symbols, the descriptions and practical drawing of a mandala, the significance of its pictorial representation, and the design of a Sri Chakra.

The third chapter unravels the symbolism of the diagrammatic representations of the mandala and briefly institutes a comparative study of the mandala as conceived by Buddhist and Shaiva schools. Other themes dealt with in this chapter are the challenges of samsara, the Buddhist conception of human personality, the strategy of grappling with passions, and the comparative study of the mandala and the Sri Chakra. It shows that the Buddhist mandala is masculine while the Sri Chakra is feminine. The author writes about the pivotal role of a guru for gaining salvation and also of the effects of different mandalas for different aspirants.

The next chapter, titled 'The Liturgy of the Mandala', enquires into the ritualism of the mandala as an aid to migration into a higher realm. It touches upon the actual method of drawing a mandala and the invocation of the divine, initiation, and leading of the neophyte into the rituals and novel spiritual experiences of the initiate.

The last chapter is 'The Mandala in the Human Body' and deals with ideas such as external and internal mandala; need for self-effort; body as an instrument of liberation; three *nadis*, currents, in the body; process of reintegration; awakening of the kundalini; three empirical states of waking, dream, and deep sleep; fourth plane of *turiya*; levels of sound in the body; and conception of *shunya*, void.

The mystical philosophy of the mandala is deep and was a secret held for centuries by a long line of teachers. Today we are able to obtain a glimpse of these esoteric teachings thanks to different authors and publishers. The book, packed with a wealth of information and clothed in delightful language, was written originally in Italian and has been lucidly translated into English.

N Hariharan
Madurai

BOOKS RECEIVED



A Monk from Bombay

Sudheendra Kulkarni
and Radha Viswanathan

Observer Research Foundation Mumbai. NKM International House, 5th Floor, 178, Backbay Reclamation, Babubhai Chinai Marg, Mumbai 400 020. 2013. 100 pp. Website: www.orfonline.org. Price not mentioned.



Swami Vivekananda in Mumbai and Maharashtra

Sudheendra Kulkarni
Observer Research Foundation Mumbai. 2013. 180 pp. Price not mentioned.

To mark the 120th anniversary of Swamiji's voyage from Mumbai to the West, these two research books highlight a great chapter in the swami's life.

REPORTS



Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

The following centres held various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Asansol:** A two-day state-level seminar on 'Unity in Diversity' on 15 and 16 February 2014, attended by about 1,100 people. **Bhopal:** A spiritual retreat on 15 February, in which nearly 150 devotees took part. A state-level youth convention on 16 February, attended by about 700 youths. **Chandigarh:** A symposium on 'Swami Vivekananda—Friend, Philosopher and Guide' on 9 February, attended by about 300 people. **Chennai Students' Home:** Classical music concerts at 3 places in Chennai from 31 January to 2 February, attended by about 2,400 people. **Chennai Vidyapith:** A special programme comprising speeches and cultural events on 7 January, attended by about 4,000 people. Cultural competitions from 27 January to 4 February, in which around 1,000 college students participated. **Cherrapunji:** A regional youth convention at Aizawl, Mizoram, on 19 February, in which 525 delegates took part. Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, presided over the convention. A value education programme for parents on 22 February, attended by 515 delegates. Dr K K Paul, governor of Meghalaya, participated as the chief guest in the programme, which was presided over by Swami Suhitananda. **Coimbatore Math:** A public meeting on 22 February, attended by 460 persons, mostly youths. **Delhi:** A two-day workshop on 31 January and 1 February for the 65 students who could reach the final round of the

Conventions
at Hyderabad



written quiz competition, in which about 60,000 students from 160 schools had participated. A classical dance performance by children on 31 January, attended by nearly 500 people. A public meeting comprising speeches by eminent persons and classical instrumental music on 1 February, in which more than 800 people took part. **Gadadhar Ashrama:** A puppet show on Swamiji on 14 January, watched by more than 400 people. Special lectures on Swamiji at the ashrama on 6 and 19 February and at 2 schools in Bankura on 10 February, attended by many devotees and students. **Hyderabad:** A students' convention on 10 January, in which about 2,000 students from different schools participated. Another students' convention on 11 January, in which nearly 900 girl students of different colleges participated. **Institute of Culture, Kolkata:** A two-day national seminar on 'Swami Vivekananda's Vision of Future Society' on 25 and 26 February; the inaugural session was attended by 250 people and the academic sessions by 107 delegates. **Jamshedpur:** Cultural competitions on Swamiji, in which about 5,000 students of 32 schools and colleges participated. The winners were awarded prizes in a programme on 19 January, attended by 1,200 people. **Japan:** A special programme comprising lectures by distinguished speakers, classical Indian dance, and a video show on Swamiji at Suita, Osaka, Japan, on 30 November. The message for the occasion sent by Mr Shinzo Abe, prime minister of Japan, was read out, and the Japanese translation of the book *The Religion of Love* by

Swamiji was released. **Kadapa:** A workshop on value education from 7 to 9 February, in which 104 teachers participated. **Kalady:** A youth rally on 13 January, in which around 1,600 students and teachers took part. Cultural competitions from 20 to 24 January, in which 160 students from 25 institutions in Ernakulam district participated. The concluding function of Swamiji's 150th birth anniversary celebration on 5 February, attended by about 500 people. **Kankhal:** A public meeting on 22 November, attended by 500 people. A congregation of monks on 23 November, in which nearly 1,000 monks of various monasteries participated. A youth convention on 24 November, in which 400 youths took part. **Kankurgachhi:** A classical music concert on 12 January, attended by about 500 people. **Kochi:** Youth camps at Kochi and Vadayampady, Ernakulam district on 1 and 23 December respectively, in which 211 youths took part. **Lucknow:** An interfaith goodwill meet on 1 January, attended by about 400 people. A state-level youth convention from 10 to 12 January, in which nearly 2,000 youths participated. **Madurai:** Value education programme for parents at 5 places from 25 January to 15 February, in which 675 parents took part. A special function on 2 February to mark Swamiji's arrival at Madurai on 2 February 1897. About 600 people attended the programme. **Malaysia:** A nation-wide essay-writing competition on Swamiji, in which about 300 students participated. The winners were awarded prizes on 12 January. A programme comprising speeches and cultural events on 12 January. **Mangalore:** A *yakshagana* (dance-drama) on 29 December, attended by 800 people. A youth convention on 11 January, in which 650 youths participated. A music programme on 14 January, in which many musicians of international repute performed. About 500 people attended the daylong programme. **Medinipur:** A youth convention on 23

January, in which around 600 youths took part. **Mumbai:** A laser show on Swamiji on 8 January, watched by about 1,000 people. **Muzaffarpur:** Cultural competitions, in which 6,003 students from 45 institutions of Muzaffarpur city participated. The winners were given prizes on 12 January. **Nagpur:** A zonal youth convention on 19 February at a college in Amravati, attended by nearly 5,000 youths. **Narottam Nagar:** A special programme comprising a speech and cultural events on 23 February, attended by about 550 people. **Patna:** A procession and a youth convention on 22 January, in which about 500 students and teachers took part. **Ponnampet:** A personality development workshop on 11 January, in which 160 college students took part. **Porbandar:** Cultural competitions and a sports meet, in which 700 students participated. The winners were given prizes on 12 January. **Pune:** An interfaith dialogue on 5 January, in which 300 delegates participated. A laser show on Swamiji on 7 January, watched by about 2,000 people. A youth convention on 11 and 12 January, attended by 1,300 youths. **Puri Mission:** Cultural competitions from 7 to 10 January, in which 434 students participated. A procession and a public meeting at a village near Puri on 13 January, in which about 500 people participated. A seminar on Swamiji on 14 January, in which 200 students took part. A monks' conference on the topic 'Swami Vivekananda and Hinduism' on 23 January, in which 100 monks belonging to various Hindu religious traditions took part. **Raipur:** In collaboration with Hind Swaraj Shodhpith, the centre conducted a seminar on 'Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi' on 8 February, inaugurated by Sri Shekhar Dutt, governor of Chhattisgarh, and attended by nearly 500 people. A seminar on 'Religious Harmony' on 9 and 10 February, inaugurated by Dr Raman Singh, chief minister of Chhattisgarh, and attended by about 500 people.

Rajkot: A two-day seminar on 'Unity in Diversity in India' on 6 and 7 February, and a three-day music programme from 6 to 8 February, in which eminent vocal and instrumental artistes of Indian classical music gave their performances; around 3,500 people attended the programmes. National level cultural competitions on 22 and 23 February, in which nearly 1,200 youths from various parts of the country participated. **Ramharipur:** A programme comprising speeches and cultural events on 11 January, in which about 1,500 people took part. A classical music concert on 23 January, attended by 200 people. **Ranchi Morabadi:** Seminars on 'Rural and Tribal Development—Based on the Teachings of Swami Vivekananda and Scientific Agriculture for Empowering India' on 11 and 12 February, in which 732 people participated. **Ranchi Sanatorium:** A football tournament for rural youths from 22 December 2013 to 12 January 2014, in which 16 teams participated. A hockey tournament on 9 February, in which 16 teams from 16 villages around Ranchi participated. **Salem:** Value education programmes for youths on 27 and 28 December at a college in Salem, attended by 200 youths. A value education programme for parents in Salem on 18 January, in which 54 parents took part. The concluding function of Swamiji's 150th birth anniversary celebration on 9 February, in which about 770 people, comprising mostly students from 14 educational institutions, participated. A value education programme on 21 February at a college in Neikkarapatty, Salem district, attended by 103 youths. **Sarisha:** A devotees' convention on 25 December, in which nearly 250 devotees took part. Puppet shows on 10 and 11 January, watched by 4,000 people. Youth conventions on 14 and 15 February, in which about 2,000 youths took part. **Seva Pratishthan:** A music concert on 11 January, attended by 250 people. A puppet show on Swamiji on 17 January, watched by 300 persons.

Shillong: A bike rally on 11 January; about 90 bikers took part in the rally, which passed through all the main roads of Shillong. Brief reception meetings were held at 2 places. A public meeting on 13 January, addressed by Dr K K Paul, governor of Meghalaya, and other dignitaries. In the afternoon cultural shows depicting the local culture of North-east India were held. Nearly 600 people attended the programme. A meeting on 21 February, attended by about 400 people, mostly youths; Swami Suhitananda addressed the gathering. **St Louis (USA):** 19 special lectures in the year 2013. The centre published the second edition of the book *Vivekananda: East Meets West*, a coloured pictorial biography of Swamiji. **Swamiji's Ancestral House, Kolkata:** On the centre's initiative, 12 public meetings were held at different places in Kolkata from 22 December to 20 January. About 6,500 people attended the programmes. Public meetings and a cultural show at the ashrama from 30 December to 15 January, attended by 2,600 people. Again 9 public meetings were held at different places in and around Kolkata from 21 January to 20 February; about 4,700 people attended the programmes. A special talk on Swamiji on 23 January at the ashrama, attended by 800 people. A five-day classical music programme, named 'Dhrupad Mahotsav', from 11 to 15 February, in which renowned vocalists and instrumentalists gave performances. Swami Suhitananda inaugurated the programme, attended by about 800 people on each day. **Vadodara:** A state-level written quiz competition on Swamiji, in which 88,000 students of 1,200 high schools participated. The prizes were awarded to winners on 19 January.

News from Branch Centres

On the occasion of Magh Mela, **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Allahabad**, organized a medical camp, discourses, devotional singing,

and an exhibition depicting the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swamiji at Triveni Sangam from 13 January to 14 February. In all, 12,685 patients were treated at the medical camp and nearly 90,000 people visited the exhibition.

Achievements

In the 13th National Paralympic Swimming Championship held at Bangalore from 10 to 12 November 2013, students of the Blind Boys' Academy at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur**, have won 7 gold, 9 silver, and 5 bronze medals. In the same championship, R V Murugan, a student of Vivekananda College at Ramakrishna Mission **Vidyapith, Chennai**, has won a bronze medal—the same student had earlier won five gold medals in the First State-level (Tamil Nadu) Paralympic Swimming Championship in July.


Three students of the school at **Ramakrishna Mission, Aalo**, were awarded gold medals and another student of the school a bronze medal in the State-level Taekwondo—a Korean martial art—Championship held by Arunachal Pradesh Taekwondo Academy from 26 to 28 November at Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh. Besides, a student of the same school has secured the first prize in the 'All India Drawing and Handwriting Competition' conducted by Akhil Bharatiya Nagarik Vikas Kendra, Aurangabad, Maharashtra, in September 2013. And on 26 January 2014, four 10-class and two 12-class students of the same school were awarded 'Chief Minister's Talent Award', comprising a certificate and a laptop for securing Cumulative Grade Point Average of 10 in the exams conducted by Central Board of Secondary Education.

Relief

Flood Relief • **Narendrapur** centre distributed

1,000 blankets among an equal number of flood-affected families of 61 villages in South 24 Parganas, Purba Medinipur, and Paschim Medinipur districts from 29 December to 19 January. **Dehradun** centre distributed 1,146 garments, 2,256 sweaters, 1,677 shawls, 1,768 jackets, 3,700 blankets, 839 mattresses, 3,000 quilts, 233 school bags, 1,435 utensils, 1,250 solar lamps, 563 torches, and 500 doormats among 2,371 families of 61 villages and 813 students of 10 schools in Ukhimath and Rudrapurayag from 8 to 20 February.

Disturbance Relief • **Bangladesh**: From 9 to 20 January **Jessore** centre distributed 14 corrugated tin-sheets among families affected by the recent disturbance in the country and also handed over to them 6 decimals (2,613 sq ft) of land for their relocation at a congenial and safer place.

Winter Relief • The following centres distributed 20,590 blankets to needy people. Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata: 209, Dec–Jan; Almora: 460, 24 Dec–9 Jan; Baghbazar: 445, Dec; Bankura: 800, 25 Dec–12 Feb; Belgharia: 283, Jan; Chandipur: 400, 23 Nov–9 Feb; Chapra: 4,015, 2 Nov–23 Dec; Deoghar: 841, 1 Dec–9 Jan; Dinajpur (Bangladesh): 750, 20 Jan–13 Feb; Gadadhar Ashrama: 63, Feb; Ghatshila: 400, 10 Dec–6 Jan; Gol Park: 2,000, 8 Jan–14 Feb; Jammu: 450, 2 Feb; Jayrambati: 2,850, 2 Dec–4 Jan; Kankurgachhi: 250, 11–17 Jan; Kanpur: 150, 23–24 Jan; Karimganj: 260, 2–20 Dec; Khetri: 42, Feb; Koalpara (Jayrambati): 500, 15 Nov–2 Dec; Muzaffarpur: 400, 24 Dec–29 Jan; Puri Mission: 600, 24 Dec–23 Jan; Rahara: 721, 24 Dec–5 Jan; Rajarhat Bishnupur: 250, 24 Dec; Ramharipur: 481, 18 Nov–16 Jan; Ranchi Morabadi: 400, 28 Nov–19 Dec; Ranchi Sanatorium: 460, 11 Dec–30 Jan; Saradapitha, Belur: 650, 2–3 Feb; Sargachhi: 630, 10 Dec–9 Jan; Sikra Kulingram: 400, 18 Dec–19 Feb; Vrindaban: 430, 24 Dec–23 Jan. Almora centre distributed 26 sweaters and 4 woollen caps from 24 December to 9 January and Garbeta centre distributed 70 sweaters on 25 December. 

Corrections • March 2014, 'Contents' page, the article 'Eternal Words' is by Swami Adbhutananda.